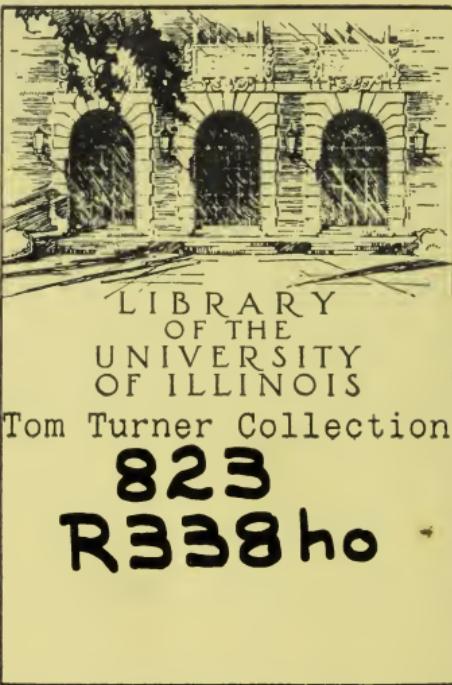
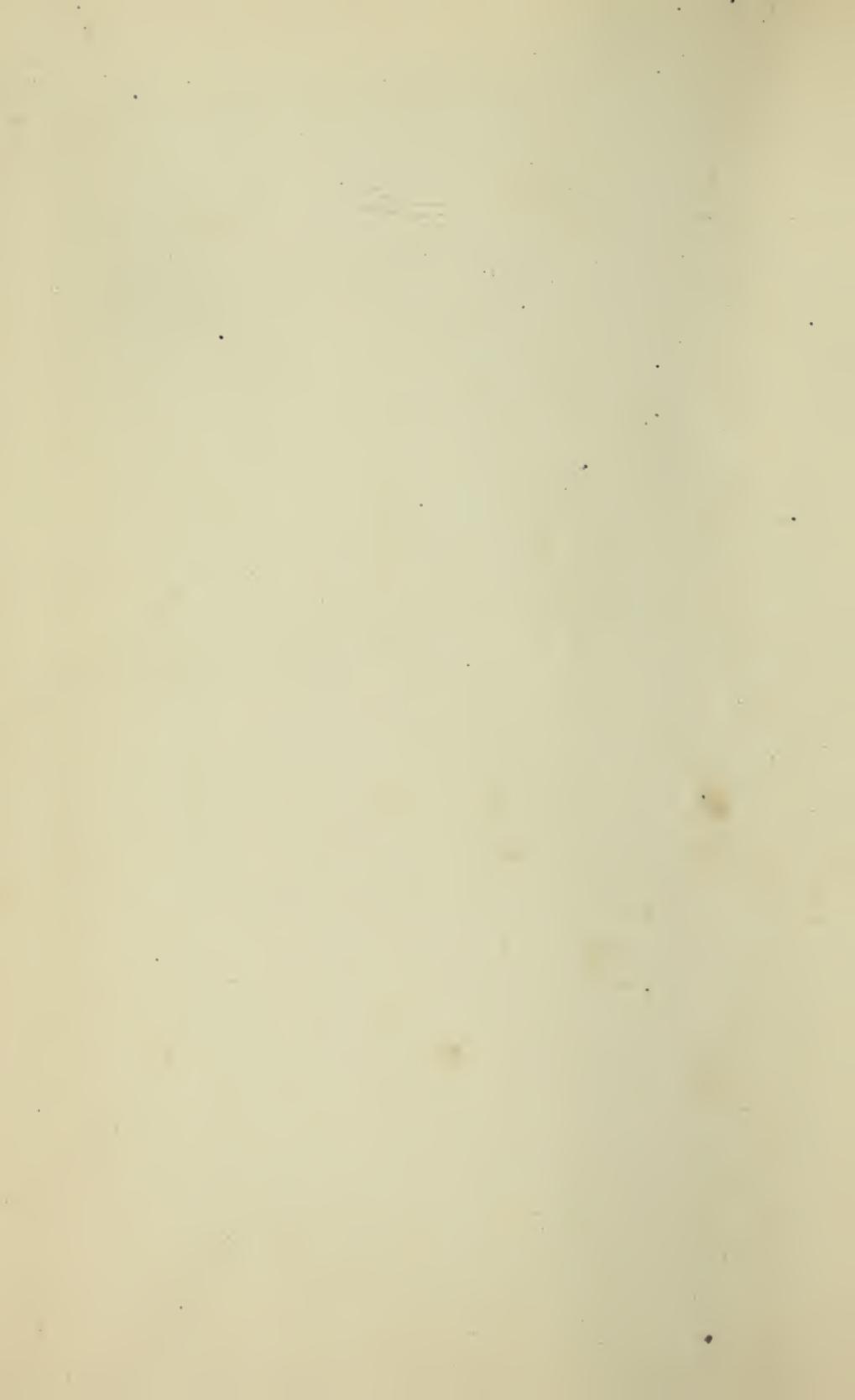


THE HOLY MOUNTAIN  
A NOVEL

STEPHEN REYNOLDS







# **THE HOLY MOUNTAIN**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR  
“A POOR MAN’S HOUSE”  
CROWN 8vo.  
*Second Edition.*

# THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

A SATIRE ON TENDENCIES  
BY STEPHEN REYNOLDS

*There's many a true word spoken in jest*

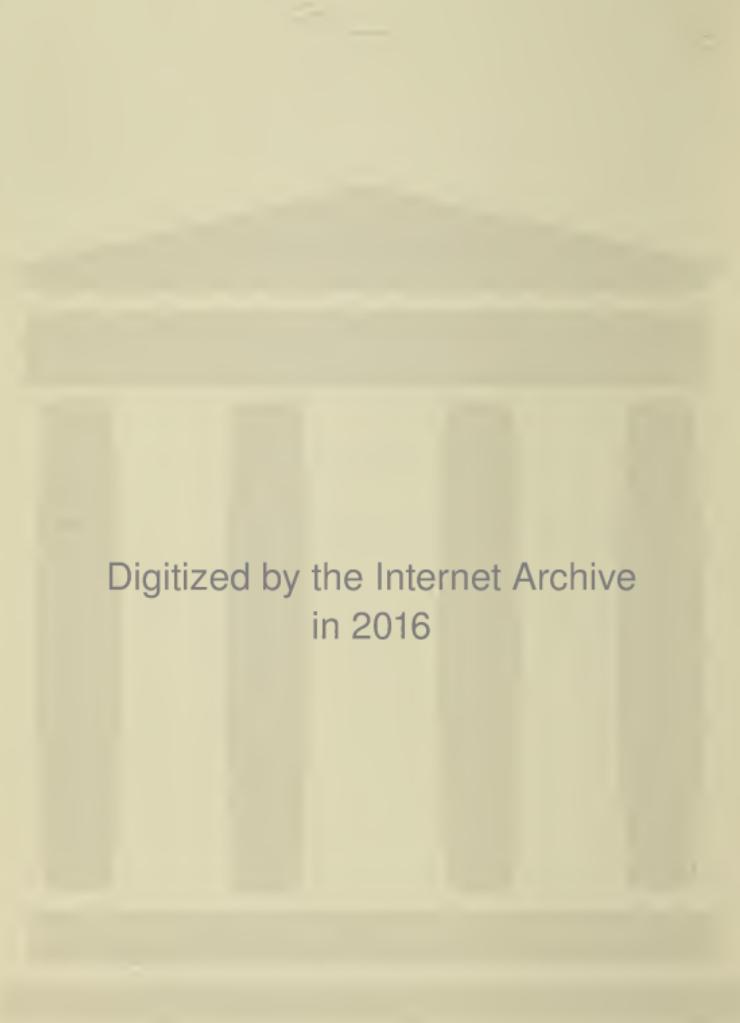
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TO  
THE AUTHOR'S  
FORMER SCHOOLMISTRESS  
AND  
PRESENT FRIEND  
**MISS ADA BENNETT**  
TO WHOSE GENEROUS CARE HE OWES  
AMONG MANY OTHER THINGS  
HIS LIFE

26 August 1893 F. W.ond. & Co., Ltd.  
Turner



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*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place ; and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.—ST. MATTHEW.*

*If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.—BLAKE.*



# THE HOLY MOUNTAIN



## **BOOK I**



# THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

## I

SHOULD you, after an absence, return to Trowbury, Wilts, your health will be inquired after ; you will be questioned as to your time of coming and going, your business in the old town, and particularly as to your private affairs ; and lastly you will be asked, “ Well, you don’t find Trowbury much altered, do you ? ” To this you should reply, “ No, not a bit ! ” and blame the railway company. Then you may make a move in the direction of the Blue Boar, that modernised coaching inn which is called ‘ The Antient Hostelry ’ by local newspapers, and gives an air of prosperous age to at least one corner of the Market Square.

Enter and drink to the health of your inquisitive friend. Drink up, dear sir ! Another Scotch and soda ? And another to the welfare of Trowbury. Say you love the dear old place ; or that Trowbury is going to the dogs. It is all the same. Trowbury is Trowbury—the small old market town on a slope of the Wiltshire Downs, with the bare windy hills above it and good fat hedged-in grazing lands below. It does not increase ; neither does it greatly diminish. It spends a vast amount of time and speech, and a certain amount of energy, in standing quite still. It takes its pride in the fact that, if it has never been better than it is, it has certainly never been worse. Not every man, nor every town, can hold his or its own by standing still. En-

viable little town ! whose rates would be twenty shillings in the pound but for the tongues that must wag before a penny's spending ; whose dull sins suffice to provide the clergy and the police with salaries ; whose wit is the handmaiden of gossip ; whose brain is as peaceful as a standing pool ; whose civic motto might be *Semper Eadem* !

And one more glass, my dear sir, to Trowbury society, to the Castle which belongs to strangers ; to the County which is great and takes care to live outside the town ; to the Fringers—families not quite County, professional and semi-professional people, and tradesmen with offices instead of shops—who may touch the hem of the County's garments at charities, bazaars and the like, and whose social position is a wee babe, born too early, that cries for careful nursing ; to the upper tradesfolk, aldermen, councillors, burgesses and busybodies, good-livers all, who have money, respectability or push, and for the most part frequent the bar of the Blue Boar ; to the lower tradesfolk who sit in shilling seats and dress amazingly on Sundays ; to workmen sober and workmen drunken ; to servants virtuous and servants not ; to those poor sportsmen who are called poachers, and to all who make use of the workhouse, the asylum or the gaol—GOOD HEALTH ! For of such is the town of Trowbury, and the devil may care which is the best and the worst of them !

## II

About the middle of the right hand side of Castle Street—the straight narrow thoroughfare on either side of which the upper tradesfolk have their shops, and many of them their dwellings and gardens too—there used to be a somewhat gaudy shop, fitted into the base-

ment of a sombre freestone house, across which was painted in large red letters picked out with gold :

JAMES TROTMAN, THE FAMOUS GROCER,  
*Established 1889.*

TRY OUR FAMOUS BLEND OF FAMILY TEA.

Here, early on a Monday in July, was enacted a series of little scenes which might have been providentially arranged for reproduction on paper bags. A servant in a sluttish print dress, with untidy hair and cap awry, stood for some minutes at the side door talking to the milkman. She put his tie straight (with an eye on another man who was sweeping the odds and ends of the shop across the pavement), heard a voice, took up her jug, and hastened inside to the kitchen. Four rather pinched young women in dowdy black raiment came chattering up the street, passed through the side door, and banged it. Another young woman, Starkey by name, more lissom in figure, better in looks and nattier in dress, hurried up the street from the other end, and likewise disappeared into the Famous Grocery Establishment. It seemed as if the place and the people had clockwork inside them. With many odd jerks and wrinklings the broad blue blinds of the shop went up. The four young women, all of them greatly smartened by the addition of white aprons and oversleeves, bustled about between the counters. Miss Starkey took her place in a glass box labelled CASH. A hatless child, carrying a pair of bloaters under one arm and a loaf under the other, bought half a pound of castor sugar and a penn'orth of adulterated pepper. The day's business began.

Within the house also, the day commenced in a similarly mechanical fashion. In a sitting-room, one door of which opened into the passage, another into

the kitchen and another into the shop, the servant, behindhand on account of her talk with the milkman, was throwing breakfast things upon the table. It was a dingy room. Not all the frivolous importations of Mrs. Trotman—bits of art muslin, photogravures, painted dicky-birds, bamboo letter-racks and so forth—could do much to relieve its dullness. It smelled of stale tobacco smoke (bad cigars) and of a dirty carpet. Even the morning light that came in through a French window, mud-splashed from the flower-bed outside, was stale and spiritless.

The clock was stopped ; but at 8.15 or thereabout Alderman James Trotman, Mayor of Trowbury, slowly descended the stairs, whistling the air of an old song called *The Honeysuckle and the Bee*. He walked into the sitting-room, monarch of all he surveyed. Although a peep through the window of the door leading into the shop appeared to be not unsatisfactory, it was at the same time very plain that he had got out of bed the wrong side, or, as was more likely, had got into it at the wrong time. For he belonged to that fraternity of lugubrious topers, which discusses things in general and its neighbours in particular every evening at the Blue Boar ; a coterie which is familiarly and justly known as the *Blue Bores*. He now walked delicately round the room, balancing himself the fraction of a second on the ball of each foot. His glance at the breakfast table might equally have meant, “ What can I do for you, ma’am ? ” or, “ Why isn’t breakfast ready ? What have you got ? ” Both no doubt were simply a part of his daily routine. At all events, the gravy splashes on the tablecloth encircled no dish of bacon. Alderman Trotman pulled down the bell deliberately, let it swing back with a snap and a jangle, and resumed his promenade around the breakfast table. Nevertheless his none too healthy countenance looked fairly contented.

He was in no sense an extraordinary man, and would indeed have repudiated any suggestion to that effect, unless some very complimentary intent were made quite obvious. He liked to call himself *A man in the street*, meaning by *street*, of course, Bond Street or Piccadilly ; not Castle Street, Trowbury. His house of many mansions was most emphatically London. The reason why his fellow-townsmen had made him mayor was, that it was his turn. His greatest practical ambitions were, to get on in life—to make money that is,—and to be a local celebrity as cheaply and with as much advertisement to his business as possible. At this time, he had no idea of becoming a world-celebrity. He was forty-five years, one month and some days old ; of middling height and middling stoutness ; middling altogether. His appearance—sloppy clothes, a dirty collar and trodden-over carpet slippers—was absolutely normal, except that his face, which had in repose a gloomy cast, mainly on account of biliousness and a drooping moustache, was rather paler than usual. In his own house he was known for a manageable, if bothersome, tyrant : in municipal affairs, as 'Mendment Trotman. He placed few motions in the *agenda* of the borough council, but with never-failing eloquence he amended, or tried to amend, every one else's proposals for the good of the dear old town. In his own opinion, and also in the judgment of thoughtful people, his two originalities were, first, that he called himself *The Famous Grocer*, and secondly, that, finding young women assistants (who lived out) far less expensive than men, he called the young women *Female Clerks*, and employed them exclusively at his counters.

After ringing the bell a second time, he seated himself before the place where the bacon should have been. Almost immediately a thin fair woman, a few years younger than the Mayor, and peevish in expression,

entered the sitting-room by the kitchen door, and seated herself before the breakfast cups. There was about her a certain air of elegance and an equally certain air of vulgarity. Her skirt was stained and with a dirty hand she fingered a golden bracelet. A pearl brooch fastened her crumpled collar. She was the Mayor's most very excellent wife. Her innate vulgarity suited him at home. Her elegance was useful to him abroad. He knew how to deal with her peevishness. She was tactful with his bilious irritability. Which of them was the profounder, the more jealous and earnest-minded scoundrel, it is impossible to say ; their methods were so different and their joint results so wonderful.

Without giving her husband an opportunity of inquiring after the bacon, Mrs. Trotman remarked sweetly : "It's coming in a minute if you'll wait."

"I've waited twenty minutes already," said Mr. Trotman in those sepulchral tones that he used on important occasions.

"Do have patience, my dear !—What *is* that little hussy up to ? "

"If at first you don't succeed . . ."

Mrs. Trotman produced a large sigh, removed her bracelet and returned to the kitchen ; whence in a few moments she reappeared, followed by the servant bearing at last a dish of fried bacon.

"H'm !" began the Mayor, turning over some of the rashers with his own fork. "Drowned in fat ! "

"You didn't give me time to drain each piece separately. . . ."

"Where's the paper ? "

"Ellen," said Mrs. Trotman with the quiet dignity of a mayoress, "the *Halfpenny Press*, please."

Ellen had gone.

"Ellen!" caterwauled the Mayoress. "The paper! Hurry up! D'you hear?"

Mr. Trotman seemed to be in a hurry. He dropped a rasher of bacon on the cloth ("Do be careful, dear."), filled his mouth over-full of hot tea ("There!"), spluttered upon his waistcoat ("James!"), used his handkerchief to wipe himself dry, placed his hand on the newspaper, and thus shortly addressed his wife:

"Where's Alec?"

"He's getting up."

"Sure?"

"I think he is."

"Then you're not sure. I know he isn't."

"How do *you* know?"

"He's sure not to be."

The Alderman paused, and then proceeded: "I won't have it!"

"What?"

"His coming in late, like he did last night."

"How *can* it matter when he's leaving home so soon? He wasn't well, I think, last night, only he wouldn't say."

"It *does* matter, I tell you."

Mrs. Trotman could not succeed this time in pacifying her husband. Wound up by waiting, it was necessary for him to run down in eloquence. "Yes," he continued, "I knew quite well why you stayed down to open the door after I was gone to bed last night. I knew, I tell you. It's a wonder to me you aren't more ashamed of him. I am. I've spent pounds more than I ought to on his education. I've made the money, and you and him have bled me. I've kept him on at the technical school to learn to be a practical man, and he's neither business-like or a scholar. Can he write a decent letter? Eh? When he was chucked out of May's,

and when Beecher wouldn't article him, I didn't say much. . . .”

“ Oh ! ”

“ Well, I forgave him, anyhow. He might have been an accountant, or an auctioneer and estate agent, by now if he'd stuck to it. There's pickings in both and *I* could have put some business in his way. In all the world there's nothing worse than a waster. Look at your brother ! ”

Mrs. Trotman coloured up at the reference to her ne'er-do-well brother, and submitted an assortment of her stock arguments in favour of her son. “ You know Alec left Beecher's because his chest couldn't stand the outdoor work. He never wanted to go there. And if you'd paid the premium, instead of trying to do it on the cheap by getting him in on trial, perhaps he'd have been there now. And he never did have any head for figures. . . .”

“ Then he ought to have a head ! What did I send him to school for ? Eh ? I can't have him in my own establishment . . . ”

“ He shan't while his mother's alive ! ”

“ —and look after him myself. He's not smart enough for me. Only last week he told Mrs. Marteene that *he* thought China tea more digestible than the Famous Blend. The Rev. Marteene told me so himself—congratulated me on such a thoughtful son ! He hasn't the head, of course, to reckon out that there's twice as much profit on the Famous. We'll see what he'll do in London—the proper place, that, for business experience. Grocers' assistants learn to be smart there. Else they starve. If I'd stayed in Trowbury, what should I have been ? A very different business man to what I am, as you very well know. If Alec thought he was going to stop about here and dangle after that yellow girl at Turner's, he was trying the game on the wrong

man. Besides, he's much too familiar with the girls in the shop. That Miss Starkey. . . .”

“Oh, I'm sure he isn't. That woman! You know he's not.”

“Oh well, I'm not so sure.—Are you getting his things ready? It's Monday now, and we start Thursday; and no putting it off, mind. Go'n see if he's getting up and tell him his father wants to speak to him—immediately!”

Mr. Trotman had dragged the teapot towards him, had refilled his cup, and was just going to open the newspaper, when his wife returned, saying: “He's got up early and gone bathing. I hope he won't catch cold. . . .”

“Do him good!” snapped his father. “He'll go to Town just the same next Thursday, anyhow.”

The Alderman's eloquence had nearly worked itself out. He took another piece of bread, and Mrs. Trotman judged that a counter-attraction or diversion, a little savoury, which is to say a tit-bit of scandal, would be timely. “D'you remember saying last week, James, that Mr. Clinch's affairs are in a mess?”

“Well?”

“I saw Mrs. Clinch last night in the butcher's. She looked awfully pale and worried.”

“Clinch still up in Town?”

“When I asked her, she turned the conversation.”

“H'm! Daresay I shall see him at one of the halls when I go up with Alec. He's not supposed to go to Town strictly on business always.”

“Don't take Alec to those music-halls, James.”

“Why not? D'you want me to sit with him all the evening in the hotel smoking-room, or take him to

Madame Tussaud's? They're perfectly refined; most refined entertainment if you know the ropes. In Rome do as Rome does, is *my* motto."

"But you don't think that John Clinch is—that he goes up to Town to see anybody, do you? It would break her heart."

"Don't know and don't care. Got little feet under many a man's table, I shouldn't wonder. That sort. Anyhow, I'll find out. Trust J. T."

Mr. Trotman, who was now at last really opening the *Halfpenny Press*, suddenly gave vent to some almost reverential exclamations. "Well I'm damned!" said he. "What on earth. . . . Look at that!"

"James!" protested Mrs. Trotman in her most exquisitely modulated and delicately shocked voice. "What *is* the matter, my dear?"

"Look!—No, never mind. I want this paper. Get me my boots. I've got a council meeting this morning. Boots! Quick, sharp!"

Such an attentive bustle there was to prepare the master of the house for leaving it. He put on his boots, lighted a cheap morning cigar, and, taking up by mistake an old newspaper, he rushed out, not to the council chamber but to the Blue Boar bar.

His wife, acting on the valuable adage that silence is the better half of truth, did not call him back to point out his mistake. As soon as she had heard the door bang, she picked up the day's newspaper and spread it out on the top of the breakfast things.

Alec Trotman, who had come quietly into the room with a bathing towel wrapped round his neck, glanced at the open paper, looked startled, made as if to go, glanced again, and did go hurriedly.

Mrs. Trotman was left staring at the central pages of

the *Halfpenny Press*, one of which was almost entirely filled up by a collection of gigantic headlines :

## VOLCANIC UPHEAVAL

SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF A MOUNTAIN IN LONDON

POPULOUS DISTRICT BLOTTED OUT

IS IT THE END OF THE WORLD ?

WHAT THE REV. DIOGENES JAMESON SAYS

*See this Evening's EVENING PRESS*

Special Copyright Articles by Special Correspondents and Authorities.

## III

To go back to the day before that on which Alderman Trotman exhibited his wits and wisdom to his wife over breakfast :

At a quarter to six on Sunday evening, three young men in top-hats and best clothes were walking up and down Trowbury Station Road. As the turkey-gobbler struts to and fro, feathers up, in a poultry yard, so did these smart young men march up and down the Station Road, pull their clothes into something like a fit, blow their noses, adjust their ties, twirl their sticks, puff cigarettes daintily, cast up their eyes at certain windows and strike elegant attitudes in turning. One of them placed his feet just as a dancing mistress had instructed him for waltzing. Their beats, though unequal in length, centred exactly opposite one single house, opposite Clinch's Emporium—a large drapery establishment that, taking tone from its master, was said to have given more wives to Trowbury and to have struggled

more valiantly against depopulation than any other two shops in the county. Knightly vigils before cold mediæval altars placed fewer promising youths on the sick-list than did Clinch's young ladies and an east wind down the Station Road. But to-night the air was soft ; fit for butterflies or crepuscular moths. Love was abroad. He wore preposterous garments but 'twas he himself.

Before long, Clinch's side-door rattled. The three youths stopped dead in their perambulations. A couple of richly dressed, many-coloured, fuzzy and fashionable young women emerged from the Emporium—gaudy butterflies emerging from as ugly a chrysalis as might be seen. Two of the young men stepped up and appropriated them ; and to the third young man one of the young ladies said gaily : “Good evenin', Mr. Trotman. Miss Jepp 'll be down in a mo'. She's jest puttin' on her 'at.” After which the couples went merrily up the road, leaving Mr. Alexander Trotman to wait a little while longer, alone.

Far from a handsome or a hearty young man was Alexander Trotman. “Sins of the fathers . . .” you might have whispered on seeing him. Even in his country-made tailcoat—a large garment very round at the corners—he seemed pliant, loose and narrow. His pinky face was the face of a man who goes about open-mouthed, and his moustache was grown just enough to make him appear slightly unwashed. His boots looked as if they contained corns ; and they did. Peculiar to him and rather uncanny, were his light grey, steady, almost sphinx-like eyes—eyes that stared people out of countenance without being aware of it, and not infrequently made even his father uncomfortable. They suggested that, in the midst of his general weakness, there survived some strong primitive force ; a head of steam too great for the rickety engine ; an energy that,

once let loose, would destroy its owner. Because his mother, till he was more than grown up, used to inquire all the year round at the butcher's for lamb chops, saying that Allie's stomach being what it was, he must have tender nourishing meat—he was familiarly called Chop-Allie Trotman, and his prestige in Trowbury was small. His was a flabby boyhood, neither good nor bad, useful nor ornamental ; a source of pride to his mother and of absurd hopes and mortifications to his go-ahead father. At a dance, however, when he was nearly twenty years old, and was wearing his first swallow-tails for the first time, he overheard a wag trying to make conversation with a dull girl. "Chop-Allie," said the wag, "is quite a lady-killer." That was all. But Chop-Allie took the words to heart. He decided that he was a Man, and in deciding, was so, more or less. He kept a picture of a fat half-clothed actress locked in a little wooden box. He ambled forth from boyhood with the deliberate intention of lady-killing. He saw himself flirting with them all and kissing the greater number. But the first lady he fell in with, Miss Julia Jepp of Clinch's Emporium, overcame him quite ; and instead of killing he was himself most grievously wounded.

When, at last, the said Miss Jepp came out of Clinch's, he ran forward as if he had not seen her for years, greeted her with a pump-handle handshake and snuffles of delight, and succeeded in saying : " You've come ! "

" Yes, I've come. But I had to hurry, I can tell you, to get ready in time. And I saw you waiting below, poor boy ! "

" Did you really ? "

" Really ! "

It was perhaps not solely to prove how much she had hurried that Miss Jepp patted her ample self all over—patted and pulled her yellow silk blouse, tweaked the

yellow ribbon round her neck, caressed her low-lying fringe, the yellow bow in her hat, and the dark hair that contrasted so strongly with her complexion, pale from long hours in the stuffy dusty Emporium. All this she did with her peaceful eyes resting on Alec.

"D'you think I shall do?" she asked.

Chop-Allie was spell-bound. "*Do!*" he blurted out. "Where's your bike. Let *me* get it."

She lightly touched his arm (some gestures have a pathetic grace: this had) with a hand that held two Prayer Books. "I want you to come to church with me, our last evening."

They had never yet braved the eyes of a church congregation together. Alec protested that a walk or a ride would be ever so much nicer, until she added: "But we'll bike up to Nurse's afterwards, and go on the Hill." Then he gave way, and to church they went.

The service was not long. Alec and Julia had each other to think about. It seemed to them but a short while before the preacher went up into the pulpit and gave out as his text:

*"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you."*

And it seemed but a short while, again, before the preacher's peroration, delivered under the flickering pulpit gas-lamps in tones of great conviction, caused Alec to take his eyes off Miss Jepp's left hand.

"If we had faith as a grain of mustard seed," the preacher's voice rang out, "we might say to the everlasting hills, Remove hence to yonder place; and they should remove; and nothing would be impossible unto us. But we have not that faith. We have little faith and little love, and therefore are we a weak-kneed generation, and all things of worth are impossible unto

us, and the blest age of miracles is past and gone. Nevertheless"—here his voice was low enough and impressive enough to startle the congregation—"it is written and endures, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing, *nothing* shall be impossible to you!"

The gas-lamps in the body of the church were turned up. The congregation shuffled as if it had the pins-and-needles in its legs. The organ gave out the melody of the last hymn. What relief! Deep breaths were taken. Alec and Julia had been so thrilled that they forgot to rise until the congregation's singing and the chink of pence in the bags brought them, too, back to everyday life. Throughout the hymn they glanced slantways at one another, and no doubt would have continued so gazing if the anxiety of the people to be out of church had not compelled them to look after their ribs and toes, instead of into each other's eyes.

How exquisitely fresh was the evening air outside!

#### IV

Once on their bicycles, Alec and Julia felt at home, for cycling was more to them than worship. When Alec made the discovery that Julia Jepp, who was flat-footed and walked badly, looked, as he said, perfectly lovely on a bicycle, he pleased himself and he pleased her; and it was his most notable advance in courtship. They rode rapidly out side by side, and soon left the strolling townsfolk behind them in that stretch of the road which is an avenue of plain and ornamental trees and also a canal of dust. None of this they noticed; neither trees, hedges, pathways, nor mere walking

couples. Only motor-cars brought them back to themselves and the world. After a couple of miles they came out upon the open, white and for the most part hedgeless road that winds over the Downs, and finally they alighted at the gate of a tiny cottage with a porch and three little white-curtained windows.

"La, Master Allie ! Is it you to be sure ? Who'd ha' thought of seein' you out here to-night !" exclaimed the small old woman, becapped, bearded, and dressed in rusty black, who ran out to greet them. "And how be father and mother, my dear ? 'Tisn't often I get into town to see 'em now."

"Oh, they're all right. . . ."

"And you don't mean to tell me this be your young lady, do 'ee ? Well, well ! "

Chop-Allie's pleasure and confusion were about equal ; for in courtships like his there must be a good deal of walking out, and even a little kissing, before young-ladyship is openly admitted ; and his proposal of marriage, his formal wooing, was yet in solution, so to speak.

"There, come in a minute, won't 'ee, my dears ?" the gossipy lonesome old woman was saying, when Alec interrupted her with : "We're going up on the Hill, nurse. May we leave our machines here ? "

"On course you may, my dear. Young folk sweet-heartin' don't want old folks' company, do 'em ? But"—turning to Miss Jepp—"you ain't going on the Hill in that lovely silk body, and your hat and hair done nice and all, fit for a live lady in her carriage.—You've got a real nice pretty young lady, Master Allie ; and I should like to see her in one o' they there pretty sun-bonnets, like they used to wear when I were young, that I should.—And I think as how you'll make him a good wife, Miss ; which I'm sure he'll make 'ee a good husband, for I've a-nursed he and I've a-nursed his

father, and fine babies they was both, though they did both have croup and bronkitties, and was delicate in their little stummicks, and was born wi' difficulty, both. But there, they d' say, 'Like father, like son'; and there's something in it, I say."

Alec and his sweetheart were greatly blushing now. "Well, we must get on, nurse," he said. "See you again soon."

"Good night, my dears.—There, I shall see 'ee again, shan't I? I'll take care on your bicycles."

Close by the cottage they left the main road for one of the rutted tracks down which chalk is brought to the lime kilns from the quarries above. Both of them being thoughtful, disinclined to prattle, and still rather embarrassed by Mrs. Parfitt's memories and enthusiasm, they had a rare opportunity of listening to the birds and grasshoppers. And this unusual silence lasted until Miss Jepp slipped into a rut overgrown by grass and cornflowers, and tore the hem of her garment.

She lifted up her skirt nine inches, retired to the bank and handled pins as to the knack trained.

"I can't never think how ladies mend things so quick," remarked Alec, regarding Julia with lively admiring eyes. "I couldn't, I'm sure."

"You're a man. There's lots of things you can do that us women can't, you know."

"I don't know. . . ."

"Men can fish and hunt and play football and cricket, and hit brutes down, and go anywhere. I wish I could."

"So do I," said Alec sadly.

"And make love. . . ." Julia added.

Alexander Trotman grasped the hand of Miss Julia Jepp. Hot words flooded his mind, but unfortunately the hand was the one that held her draperies. (The other one held her pins.) Once more she trod on her skirts and tore them.

"There! Oh my!"

"I'm so sorry. . . ." Alec began.

"You go on, Mr. Trotman. I think it's my under-skirt."

She tore the lowest flounce from her petticoat, straightened her hat, patted her hair, and rejoined Alec. Walking some two or three feet apart, they mounted the hill.

"Lovely, isn't it?" observed Miss Jepp.

"There's some air up here," replied Alec.

It is a Trowbury commonplace that the Downs—'where there's always some air going'—lend salubrity to the town; which, to tell the truth, is fully two hundred feet below, and frequently seems to obtain its air rather from fried-fish shops than from the wind-swept Downs.

The lovers came to a stop. Shortness of breath has been the cause of much admiration of hill scenery. Miss Jepp was red in the face—not quite healthily red—and Alec was breathing with a slight wheeze.

"It's lovely," said the former between breaths.

"Yes—lovely!" echoed the latter.

They were right.

Away in front of them stretched the undulating sage-coloured plain, most exquisite in its gentle sharp-cut curves, and tinged on the horizon with the colours of the sky, now flushed by the approaching sunset. An ancient camp, topped by a group of weird and desolate black pines, jutted out into the vale on one side. On the other side, and also behind them, was a broad fertile valley, and in the distance a range of shining purple hills that looked no less than mountainous in the clear proportionless air. Ramshorn Hill, with its abrupt sides and its circlet of beech trees, crouched before them like a huge breathing animal. Cloud shadows glided slowly over it, and a flock of sheep, like a large flat yellow beetle,

crawled down it towards one of the dewponds on the plain. The wind whistled through the grass stalks as if the air was wishful to caress the earth. The place was holy—a temple for some god too mighty, too impersonal, to be worshipped in temples built with hands ; yet a god no mightier on earth than him the lovers were prepared to worship another way.

Said Alec, “ I’m a bit blown. Shall we sit down ? ”

“ Just a weeny bit, if you like. That’s it ; sit on my skirt ; the grass may be damp. If I’m late the guvnor ’ll fine me and just about give it to me to-morrow morning.”

“ Oh lor ! Will he ? Mine tries to, sometimes.” Alec took out a bronzed cigarette case. “ You don’t mind smoke ? Plenty of air up here to carry it off.”

“ I *won’t* mind this time,” answered Miss Jepp in what she imagined to be the tone and manner of real unsmoked ladies. Then she continued in her ordinary voice : “ Me and Miss Loder *have* smoked out of the bedroom window once or twice. Really ! But I didn’t like it a bit.”

“ Have one now ? ”

“ No, *no* ! Really ! ”

“ I’m going so soon. . . .”

“ Poor boy ! And I shan’t see you again—till when ? ”

“ I don’t know. Never, I shouldn’t wonder. Why don’t you get a berth in London ? We could go to all sorts of places.”

“ Twouldn’t be any good. I wish I could. Really I do ! You see, dear,—she laid her hand on his arm—“ in Trowbury I’m Miss Julia Jepp from the leading London houses and they think I know the Paris fashions, but in Town I’d be only Julie Jepp from nowhere. ’Twas the doctor that first sent me into the country out of London because I’m delicate ; and I don’t want to die, do I ? Not just yet. . . .”

Alec did not answer. Instead, he slid his arm round her waist—and for so doing was mightily rewarded. “Not now I know you,” she added; and she cuddled to him: cuddled him to her, would perhaps be more correct. Before long, they were half lying on the elastic but thistly sward. Alec toyed with the long watch chain around Julia’s neck. Incidentally he touched her hair, as gingerly as one touches a cat reputed to scratch and bite. However old to mankind, these simple actions were new to Alec and Julia. Speechless and sadly joyful, they thought they were thinking, until Julia sighed prodigiously and said: “I expect you are glad you are going to London—really.”

“I am, you know, in a way; and I’m not. I don’t know. I wish you could come.”

“Poor boy! One never knows one’s luck. What part did you say you were going to?”

“A place in Acton, on the Uxbridge Road, father says.”

“I know that part. I’ve been there,” said Julia, rather glad of something definite, however trivial, to talk about. “We had a young lady from there at our place in Oxford Street when I was in Town, and she got ill, and I used to go out there to see her until she died. She was my partic’lar chum, she was.”

“Oh. . . . What’s it like?”

“Well, I don’t exactly know: I can’t say, that is. It’s not town and it’s not country. It’s mostly building land and new houses and cheap shops.”

“Nowhere to walk?”

“There’s some nice fields behind Acton.”

“Nice ones?”

“They used to make me shiver; really they did. I always caught cold there. I used to go walks with that young lady I told you, when she was well enough, and she used to say the fields were dying like she was and

the houses were tombstones ; but some of them are rather nice."

" I wish I wasn't going, Julia."

The streaming red clouds had solidified, as it were, to a dense violet while the sun had been sinking below the horizon ; and as the sharply outlined gullies of Ramshorn Hill faded into the general mass of Downs and clouds, the heavens and the earth seemed to become one vast cloudland. Alec and Julia came under the spell of the Downs. They spoke reverently to one another. Their longing augmented their reverence—for what, they did not know.

" I do wish I wasn't going," Alec repeated. " We shan't have any more rides or walks. I don't want to go a bit."

" But you must, you've got to, dear."

" I won't ! I wouldn't mind if there was a place like this in London."

" But you're going to work and get an income, and then we'll . . ."

" We shan't never climb up Ramshorn Hill any more. We shall write letters, and then we shall stop that. People always do. I've got an idea we shan't never see each other any more."

" God will take care of us," said Julia Jepp as she bent forward and kissed him on the forehead.

He was near weeping ; was like a naughty boy.

" D'you remember what the clergyman said ? " she asked. " It's in the Bible : *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye should say to that mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it should remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*"

" That's all rot."

" If ye have faith. . . ."

" Julie ! Julie !" cried Alec with unformulated despair.

They kissed ; neither decorously on the forehead this time, nor shyly on the cheek.

They clung to each other, a little spot on the broad open Downs.

It was the moment when the hills are in perfect peace ; after the day birds have ceased twittering ; before the night birds fly. The wind was now very still.

“ Julie ! ” cried Alec again, and again they kissed. “ I wish Ramshorn Hill was near Acton. I can’t go away from the Downs. I won’t. I want them, Julie.”

He raised himself a little, and peered as it were violently into the darkening scene, without speaking.

The Downs trembled.

“ What’s that ? ” said Julia in a whisper.

A puff of cool air struck them. A corncrake gave a rasping screech behind them.

“ Only a corncrake. . . . ”

“ Not that ! ”

Julia scrambled to her knees.

“ *Look !*  ”

Alec stood up too. He shuddered.

Where Ramshorn Hill had been, there was a large white patch and something like a hollow. They could see the last shred of sunset—a lingering coloured cloud which before had been hidden by the beech-topped hill.

“ What is it ? ” said Julia breathlessly. Her breast was heaving and her hat awry. She was ugly with fright. “ *Look, Alec !*  ”

“ God ! ” exclaimed Alec in a voice unlike his own. “ I’ve gone and done it ! ”

“ You . . . What ? ”

“ I thought what you said—what the preacher—the Bible—says,—and when we were—were—you know—sitting down—I wished it. . . . Oh, God ! I’ve done it now ! ”

"Done what? *What?*"

"Moved Ramshorn Hill. It's gone!"

They stared into one another's eyes. Julia recovered first.

"P'raps you haven't, really. Let's go and see."

They started walking over the Downs, towards the great white patch.

It was almost dark. Both of them were shivering. They felt as if there were presences, invisible eyes, abroad on the Downs.

Where Ramshorn Hill had lain, there was a hollow like an immense quarry. They stood on the edge and looked down into it, into a whitish blackness.

"What's that?" screamed Julia.

A rabbit with a broken foreleg hopped up over the topmost edge and crouched on Julia's boot. Pieces of chalk were falling deeply into the hollow. They echoed from side to side.

Ramshorn Hill was gone.

Alec and Julia stayed a few minutes, looking down into the vague, terrible, mysterious hollow. Alec heard the wind rising. "Let's get down to nurse's," he said.

"Yes, yes! What *will* you do?"

"Promise you won't say anything to anybody at all, Julie."

"I won't."

"Sure certain?"

"Oh, chase me!" said Julia with an hysterical attempt at laughter. "What a do!"

"Be quiet!" said Alec. It was the first time he had ever spoken to her with command in his voice.

Silently and separately they had gone up; silently and a little apart, with careful peering footsteps, they returned down the track.

A light appeared in the back window of the cottage, as if to guide them.

"Julie," said Alec, taking her arm, "I forgot when I moved the hill that you wouldn't be in Acton."

"You don't know the hill is.—I say, how they'll look!"

The Downs were gathered into darkness.

## V

Behold the wonder-workers then! slinking down from the hill as if some fellow-townsman, some tell-tale-bit acquaintance of their fathers and masters, had suddenly broken in upon their youthful endearments. Never before had they been in quite such an extraordinary state of mind. It was not that they had had time to become conceited; to feel themselves the distinguished practitioners of real miracles. It was not that they themselves were filled with wonder. On the contrary, they simply brimmed over with a boiling bubbling mash of half-cooked emotions. For it is too hastily assumed that the faculty of wonder is common to all men, and needs no cultivation. Alec and Julia could have wondered generally at the usual objects of that attitude; at the common objects of the seashore, at the triumphs of engineering, at the marvels of a cheap press, and at their own insides. But Ramshorn Hill . . .

No. That at present was too great for their wonder. They knew, of course, that it was gone; they knew the circumstances under which it went; and that was all. But on the other hand, they understood secrets quite nicely; they had often made and broken them; it was their pledge of secrecy that their intellects were

most capable of fastening on ; and that, indeed, was the topmost subject in their minds.

Mrs. Parfitt, the antique and hirsute little nurse, had been all ears for their footsteps. She ran out to the gate, lifting her feet straight up and down after the manner of old women in soft boots, and her side-curls waggled bravely as she called out : “ La, Master Allie ! I thought you was never coming, my dear ; and I been so frightened I didn’t know what to do. There ! come in and bide a minute, and I’ll tell ‘ee all about it.”

She hustled them into the cottage and turned up the lamp, at which they blinked stupidly like fowls at roost when a light is taken into the hen-house.

In an awe-stricken voice, Mrs. Parfitt began again : “ There’s been a . . . La, Master Allie ! How pale you d’ look, and I do declare if your nice young lady bean’t paler ’n you be ! You didn’t ought to stay up on they cold Downs now the nights is drawin’ in—sittin’ on the grass, I’ll be bound—ay, I knows ! If you d’ go sweetheartin’ so fast, you won’t have no sweetheart left come you be married. Now sit you down, do ‘ee, and I be goin’ to give ‘ee a drop o’ summut short ; and then I’ll tell ‘ee—No ! I be goin’ to do it. You be ‘bout shrammed and ’twill do ‘ee a power o’ good. Sit you down by the fire, my dears. I d’ always have a little fire in the chill o’ the evenin’, or else off I goes to bed.”

Though the lovers were already late enough, their contact with the miraculous had inclined them to stay near any homely human being. The cottage, after the dark wide Downs with their whistling wind and the great hollow, was like home after travel, shore after a stormy voyage. So they sat them down and looked sheepishly about the room ; gazed at each other in timid expectant fashion. Mrs. Parfitt busied herself with hot water, glasses, spoons and sugar—all the cheerful apparatus of hot grog. She set a glass-stoppered bottle—most

like a vinegar bottle—upon the table. “There, Master Alec ! ‘Tis some o’ your father’s own, what he give me last Christmas, and I ain’t hardly touched it yet, you see.”

Alec recognised the label on the whiskey. He knew its retail price, two and elevenpence. He knew its wholesale price—very considerably less—for he had heard his father boast about it. He even thought he knew the profit on a hogshead. By mistake one day his mother had dosed him, for colic, with that famous whiskey, and the doctor had had to be called in either for the colic or the whiskey. He thought, therefore, that they had better be going.

“No, no, my dear !” protested Mrs. Parfitt. “ ‘Twill do ‘ee a power o’ good. And I want to tell ‘ee—while you’ve a-been on the hill.”

Glasses were filled, spoons clinked, and an odorous steam, not, be it said, wholly free from rankness, ascended like a sacrifice towards the ceiling. Cosiest of little parties it seemed—the young man taking his future wife to the nurse of his childhood. Alec sipped, keeping his glass in his hand, and sat back further in his chair. Julia took a gulp, wiped her mouth, shuddered and set the glass down on the table very deliberately. Mrs. Parfitt poured herself out what she called a tiny teeny drop o’ good stuff.

“As I was a-goin’ to say,” she began once more. Then changing her mind, she got up and reached down something from the mantelshelf. “Look at my poor little china shepherd,” she complained, “as I’ve had ever since I left your ma’s.”

The china shepherd was broken into several pieces. Alec was requested to take the bits into his hand ; likewise Miss Jepp. The old woman stood over them. She shook her head, uplifted a finger, and said solemnly : “ ‘Tis my belief as ‘twas an earthquake shook it down ! ”

Alexander Trotman looked, reddened, rose up, sat down again. Julia Jepp sat where she was and made warning faces at her excitable young man.

" Didn' 'ee feel the ground tremble ? " continued Mrs. Parfitt in a ghost-story voice.

" When ? " inquired Alec faintly, glancing at Julia.

" P'raps it was a cart going by," hazarded Julia with a fierce stare at Alec.

" Bless you ! I d' know the sound o' that. 'Twas an earthquake, I tell 'ee ; and I thought of the Burnin' o' Rome picture in your pa's sittin' room and said *Our Father*."

" We don't have earthquakes nowadays," said Alec, in whose mind earthquakes and miracles had become somewhat mixed up.

" No," Julia added authoritatively. " And we *must* be going now ; really ; mustn't we, Mr. Trotman ? "

Mrs. Parfitt took not the least notice. She had been watching them keenly in order to feast on their surprise. Instead, she saw hesitation and significant glances.

" Don't 'ee tell I you don't know nothin' about it ! " she burst out triumphantly. " 'Tis that what's made 'ee so pale. If I didn't think 'twas when I see'd 'ee comin' ! "

Alec and Julia bobbed their heads violently at one another, got up, and began whispering : " Nurse won't tell.—'Tisn't that.—She's safe.—Nobody's safe. Your fault if it does.—All right.—Remember, I told you so."

A moment's silence, and then :

" It was me," said Alec.

" Alec's moved a hill," Julia explained.

" Ramshorn Hill," said Alec.

" And we don't know where it's gone to."

" Acton, p'raps. . . ."

" La, my dear ! What do 'ee mean ? "

The secret was beginning its travels. In the three-cornered conversation that followed, Julia told the tale, Alec supplied corroborative details, and Julia again tried to stifle her lover's indiscretions—with no great success so far as the glorious fact of kissing was concerned. Mrs. Parfitt would not even appear to believe them until Julia repeated the preacher's text. At that, the old woman credited the miracle in very orthodox fashion, as the Bible itself is credited; sufficiently to talk about it, that is, and to indulge in supposition and partial belief; no more. She was implored to keep their secret, and to humour them she gave her promise as if she really thought there was a great occurrence to be kept dark.

"Course I will," she said. "But just you go home, Allie dear, and get quick to bed like a good boy. I'll be bound 'tis the earthquake's upset 'ee a bit; and I 'spect as Mr. Merritt, Squire Burdrop's shepherd, 'll find your Ramshorn Hill safe enough come daylight. Now good night, my dears. Go straight home, and sleep tight."

It was past ten o'clock. The lovers were tremulously tired. They arranged to meet each other on the morrow at Clinch's side door, after the young ladies had finished their one helping of pudding, but before the Clinch family had got through its second.

"I don't know what we shall do—might be a devil of a row," said Alec, with a whine shading into bravado.

"I can't hardly believe we've done anything," said Julia.

"*I can't. . . .*"

They kissed again in parting—poor babes in the world!

Alec's mother let him in, asked him what was the matter, gave him bovril and threatened him with his father. Mr. Clinch, who let Julia into the Emporium,

fined her there and then one shilling. Mrs. Parfitt locked up her cottage and hurried up the road to see if Mrs. Merritt—Squire Burdrop's shepherd's wife—was yet abed.

## VI

Children passing the porch of the Blue Boar Hotel, look down the hospitable passage, into the hall and at the pillars thereof, as reverently as a yokel takes his first peep into the Houses of Parliament. If they are sent there on an errand, to order the bus, to buy brandy or a bottle of wine, they creep along the passage with timid steps and wait on one foot just inside the swing-doors until that great lady the barmaid calls them up to the long bow-windowed bar. Then they advance shyly to the side, and deliver their messages in wee small voices, so that the great gentlemen who lounge at the front window shall not be able to hear. If they are kept waiting, which is more than probable, they steal glances at the white, red and green glasses, at the crystal spirit-kegs and decanters, at the hanging tankards and piled-up cigar boxes inside the windows ; or else they open their eyes at the larder on the other side of the hall, with its old bull's-eye panes of glass, its Stilton cheeses and its mighty joints of beef. They wonder into what mysterious and sacred regions the wide staircase leads, and what is on the other side of the broader spring-doors which are covered with highly tinted paper transparencies of saints, and which, if they should open, reveal the spacious, cavernous, cook-smelly and fly-blown Blue Boar kitchen. They shift out of the way of waitresses scurrying by with laden trays. They jump when an electric bell goes off above their heads. They look down at the ground respect-

fully if the awful dignity of the proprietor approacheth. When one of the great gentlemen saith a great big *damn* it hath an auguster sound than father's *damns* at home. It is something like church to them, the low-ceiled, vault-like, pillared hall, with its artificial light browbeating the daylight, its brightnesses, and its dark and dingy shadows.

O children, revere the Blue Boar bar ! Trowbury is a big little place, and the Blue Boar bar is the head and centre of it, struggle the teetotalers never so much. More business is done there than in the Borough Council Chamber, and as much fuss is made about it as in Parliament itself. Treasure your memory of it on a market day, when half a dozen servers are treading on one another's corns, and a seething pack of farmers, together with tradesmen who hope to make something out of them, is calling and hallooing for drink and is paying strong compliments to the barmaid ; when the passage is almost impassable, and the pavement outside is crowded with men in all varieties of garment, who stand in talkative attitudes and pour samples of corn from one hand into the other.

But on ordinary days—when you usually see it, children—the place is given over to the peaceful occupation of your fellow townsfolk. There they exchange their wit and wisdom. Marriages are predicted and made there, and characters undone. It is the noisiest place to hush a thing up in, and the quietest place to spread it abroad. There men discuss their enemies, friends, children and relations ; their wives even. If your father is a Blue Bore, you may be certain that he has blabbed about you there, and has listened to those fat and elderly Paul Prys. There the Blue Bores obtain bilious sympathy for their bilious ailments, or professional sympathy from a caged barmaid. They arrange the affairs of town and country, growing wise

over glasses. Debts, scandals, health, visits to London, deeds good and bad ; all is talked over and much of it known. Almighty and omniscient are the Blue Bores, some kindly and some not. 'Tis the headpiece of Trowbury and of Trowbury's enlightenment. *In vino veritas.* So be it !

## VII

In these days of a cheap press, not without a powerful trumpet of its own, nor lacking wind to blow it, people often forget that a piece of news is most interesting by far to those whom it concerns. But, after all, to onlookers, the reception of that piece of news is decidedly the most entertaining thing about it. So with the news of Alexander Trotman's miracle. For though Ramshorn Hill was not unimportant to London ; inasmuch as it altered the topography of a western suburb ; squashed, killed, and utterly hid three or four little families of Acton ; and caused for a time no small dislocation of metropolitan customs ; it made nevertheless a further-reaching and more permanent impression on the district whence it was removed, on the town and environs of Trowbury. Horrible catastrophes do not stir the heart of London ; unless that heart is really Fleet Street ; and it is notorious that the palpitations of Fleet Street are as short-lived as they are profitable and alarming. Trowbury, even, did but devote a flabby "How terrible!" to the squashed families of Acton. The event worked itself out thus : at first London was excited while Trowbury was entertained ; then London found entertainment, as it always does, whilst excitement in Trowbury grew more intense. London and Trowbury played see-saw ; a spectacle which was very wonderful ; Dignity and Impudence seated on either end of

the swing-board making mouths at one another. But who can tell which was which ?

On the Monday morning, at the very hour when Alderman Trotman was talking to his wife, Miss Miles and Miss Cora Sankey, *soi-disant* manageress and bar-maid respectively, and Robert, the billiard-marker of the Blue Boar Hotel, were all three putting the bar ready for its morning customers. Miss Miles, a fair, large and somewhat languishing beauty—beloved of customers who wanted quiet talks—was flicking the shelves with a duster. Rollicking Miss Cora Sankey was polishing the counters. Robert was alternately burnishing the taps of the beer-engine and pressing gently a boil on the back of his neck.

The hall was gloomy, for since the sun was said to be shining outside, the gases inside had been left turned down. Miss Sankey's terrible laugh—a prolonged *he-he* with a dying fall, which could not but have grated on the ear of a sensitive man in a perfectly sober state—and her equally terrible, distressingly cheerful chatter, were continually firing off like a magazine popgun. The “Smile of the Blue Boar,” and “Light in our Darkness,” this noisy and popular little woman had been dubbed ; and since she was in no sense beautiful or charming, it has to be believed that her voice and laugh, and her dexterity with taps and glasses and men in their cups, formed her stock-in-trade as a barmaid.

She raised herself from her polishing ; stretched, and yawned. “Who d'you say'll be first in this morning, Miss Miles ? Mr. Ganthorn or old Trotman ? ”

“ I'm sure I don't know. Neither perhaps.”

“ But who d'you think ? ”

“ Mr. Ganthorn probably.”

“ Well, I say Trotman. What'll you bet ? ”

“ Thank you. I've no wish to bet. Life isn't long enough to bet on bores.”

Miss Sankey turned to the billiard-marker, asking loudly, as if he had been in the boot-hole on the other side of the hall : "Who d'you say, Robert ? "

"I should say, Mr. Ganthorn, Miss."

"How much d'you bet ? Even threepences ? "

"Right y're, Miss."

"Done ? "

"Yes."

"Put up your threepence then."

When they had put their coppers side by side on the shelf, near the cigar boxes, Miss Sankey burst into an echoing laugh. "Got you now, Robert, me boy ! I counted yesterday how many drinks they had each. Mr. Ganthorn had twelve Scotches and Mr. Trotman had seventeen. Trotman's bound to be first. D'you see ? He'll wake up with a mouth and a liver, fat-headed and no end thirsty. Better give me your three-d. now at once. HE-He-he-he-he ! What'll you bet he'll have ? Scotch and soda, or B. and S., or phizz ? "

"Spect you've asked him beforehand, Miss," replied Robert sulkily.

"No, I haven't, Robert. Come on ! Which is it ? "

"Robert," said Miss Miles. "You won't be finished if you don't get on."

"HE-He-he-he-he ! "

Outside the Blue Boar. . . . Who is this small, jaunty, clean-shaven little man with peculiar spectacles, that is coming down the Market Square ? He is exactly opposite the Blue Boar porch. Eyes left ! Left turn ! Eyes front ! Quick march ! He is safely within the Blue Boar passage—screened from the eyes of the Market Square. He is in the hall ; at the bar.

Miss Sankey has lost her bet.

"Good morning, Mr. Ganthorn. How's you ? Didn't expect the pleasure so soon."

The manageress, who disliked Mr. Ganthorn's airy-mindedness, retired in a dignified manner to the office behind the bar.

"H'm, h'm! Beastly liver on me. Don't know why. H'm! Brandy and a *little* so-dah, please, Miss Cor-ah. How's that for a rhyme?"

"He-he! getting poetical in our old age."

"How's the boil, Robert?"

"Bad, sir, thank you."

"You ought to take a teaspoonful of brewer's barm three times a day, Robert. Fine old remedy for boils."

"What ye talking about?" exclaimed Light in our Darkness. "I'm going to do the trick when it's ready. A piece of lighted paper in a ginger-beer bottle, and clap it over. I'm a good nurse. . . ."

"You are, Miss."

"Barm prevents 'em," said Mr. Ganthorn.

"But Robert's got his. It ain't prevented, you see. HE-He-he-he-he! We'll manage all right, better than lancing. Nurse you too, Mr. Ganthorn, if you're ill."

"I know how to take care of myself."

Miss Miles had come to the office doorway. "Robert," she said, "go and tell Boots to put on a fresh cask of bitter."

Robert took his sixpence from the shelf, spat on it, and went.

"Not a bad lad," Mr. Ganthorn remarked.

"Wants teaching a bit," said Miss Sankey. "D'you know, he got the chuck from his last situation—gentleman's mansion—because he would smoke and would not wear a nightshirt. HE-He-he-he-he!—Morning, Mr. Trotman. How's you this fine day?"

Mr. Trotman was making his entrance by the back-door with the important mien of a borough mace-bearer. He carried a copy of the *Halfpenny Press*, which he

strode to unfold as he walked. Just as he reached the counter he succeeded. He spread out the paper.

"Look here!" he said.—"Damn!"

"Sh, sh, Mr. Trotman! HE-He-he-he-he! You know you mustn't say that here or you'll have to put a penny in the hospital box."

"Confound! Have you got the *Halfpenny Press?*?"

"It's in use in the coffee-room."

"What's up?" asked Mr. Ganthorn.

"Didn't you see?"

"What? I haven't time for reading ha'penny rags."

Mr. Ganthorn turned ceremonially to his glass.

"Haven't you heard anything?"

"Heard? What?"

"One'd think Robert's boil was gone off bang," shrieked Miss Sankey. For once, however, the gentlemen took no notice of Light in their Darkness.

"Why, they say that a vast mountain has suddenly appeared in London—volcanic upheaval—extinct volcano. . . . I read it in the paper."

"Street upheaval, I expect," said Mr. Ganthorn in the tone of one closing a subject. "Some of the heavy sky-scrapers they're putting up are quite enough to do it, to say nothing of laying electric cables among the gas and water mains."

"But it has absolutely blotted out a vast number of men women and children. . . ."

"*Halfpenny Press.* Take it *cum grano*—with salt, Trotman."

"All sauce is my condiment," said Miss Sankey. "I love it! Are you a condimentarian, Mr. Trotman?"

"All in moderation, Miss Sankey," replied Mr. Trotman. "I remember when I was a boy, my father always said . . ."

"Morning, Mr. Clinch! Enjoyed your visit to Town?"

Eh ? I 'spect you have. There ! you're blushing. HE-He-he-he-he ! ”

Perhaps Mr. Clinch of the Emporium did indeed blush. Who can tell ? His short fat body was surmounted by a round red face which blushed at all times. So rubicund was he that, where other people's faces inclined to red, over the cheek-bones, his own indicated by a tint of blue where his cheek-bones were buried.

He regarded Miss Sankey for a moment, placed a fat white ringed hand on the edge of the counter, and said in a voice very like a mongrel dog's when it has a bone : “ I'd pack *you* going. Gin with two drops of Angostura. At once. Biscuits. And the paper.”

“ All right. Paper's in use. You ain't in your own ragshop, Mr. Clinch, and I ain't your wife or one of your young ladies. Pity you didn't get killed in Mr. Trotman's terrible catastrophe. Came down by the early morning train, didn't you ? I know. I've got to know when I've got to serve people like you, and listen to your talk.”

Miss Miles's reappearance from the office strangely damped the fire of Councillor Clinch's temper. But just when Alderman Trotman was buttonholing him to tell him about the catastrophe, a tall bovine man with side-whiskers, his dress an old tail-coat, knee breeches and crumpled muddy gaiters, walked quickly and heavily into the hall.

“ Early, Mr. Potterne ? ”

“ Gie I two brandies an' one small soda, Miss—all in one, please. Never felt the need o' a drop so much in all my born days.”

He turned to the Blue Bores : “ Ramshorn Hill's gone, clean gone in a night,” he said, looking into each face in turn. “ An' they told I in the yard as half London's been buried. 'Tis a judgment ! ”

“ Nonsense, all of it,” remarked Mr. Ganthorn.

"I tell 'ee I saw the hill gone wi' me own eyes!"

"What is it, d'you think?" inquired Mr. Trotman in a voice full of an awe that was partly due to the subject and partly to Farmer Potterne's reputed wealth.

"That's what I dunno. Garge be comin' up the yard. He'll tell 'ee."

"Something very serious for the world is happening," Mr. Trotman said. "I've left this morning's *Halfpenny Press* at home, but I should say . . ."

"I should say," Mr. Ganthorn interrupted, "that you'd better look after your own affairs instead of terrible catastrophes. We're going to bring up the question of your house in Low Street at this morning's council meeting."

"What for? It's not on the agenda."

"What for, indeed? Drains! I told you when you bought the property that the drains would cost you more than the place itself."

"The drains are all right."

"The house is nothing more or less than a ventilator for the main sewer. There's not a proper trap on the place."

"Well, what the . . ."

"You'll find out at the meeting. How many people have had fever and sore throats in that house? Eh? Have they got 'em now, or not? One of your tenant's doctors' bills drove him bankrupt. The surveyor warned you a long time ago."

"I tell you what," said the Mayor. "I'll make you, and the surveyor too, understand that I am the civic head of this town."

"Till next November, old chap.—I say . . ."

Alderman Trotman walked out of earshot. George Potterne, a smarter and stupider edition of his father—a young man who seemed to be clothed in innumerable coloured ties, collars, waistcoats and gaiters—stumped in from the yard.

"Yer, Garge ; they won't believe I. Tell 'em . . ."

"Tell 'em to go and see," said Garge. He winked and wagged his head at Mr. Ganthorn. "Old man's got it on the nerves a bit."

"So has our Famous Grocer. It's all rot."

"The hill *is* gone."

"That 'tis ! "

"Some slight seismic disturbance . . ."

"Don't know them half-crown words. Ramshorn Hill be gone, an' that's enough for me. Seeing's believing."

"And there's been a catastrophe in London," Mr. Councillor Clinch added.

"Nobody 'll be a penny the worse for it all," said Mr. Ganthorn. "They make mountains out of mole-hills nowadays. . . ."

"I tell 'ee, ye little whippersnapper, they be a good many pennies the worse. I be, damn it ! "

The speaker was a stout florid man in old-fashioned sporting clothes ; somewhat the figure of Mr. Clinch, but rounder and firmer, with a complexion that owed its colour rather to good living and the weather, than to over-eating and liquor. It was Squire Burdrop, a survivor of the old wheat-farming days, before those who tilled the earth called themselves agriculturists. "I be a lot the worse," he continued in an angry voice, "and my poor wife, she's done nothing but go off into faints since she felt the ground a-trembling. I rented Ramshorn Hill because I wanted more grazing, and I won't pay me rent for it—not I ! I'll talk to the Crown Commissioners when I see 'em. I won't pay a penny. I'll claim damages. I'll bring an action.—Pint o' old and a fourpenny cigar, please, my dear.—When I took the grazing of Ramshorn Hill last year, how did I know 'twas going to go like a thief in the night ? How did I know, I say ? I *won't* pay rent for the darned thing—

there ! My shepherd's out now trying to find a couple o' my best lambs—gone too, I s'pose. Whosever's done it, I'll be level wi' em. Dan'l Burdrop's never been done down yet. . . . 'S anybody know anything about it ? "

" We heard . . . "

" The milkcarts said . . . "

" In London, Squire, there's been a . . . "

" There, damn it ! You don' know anything about it, I can see, none on 'ee. When you want a thing looked after, look after it yourself. That's true !—I'll come and see that hunter o' yours to-morrow, Potterne. D'you think she'll carry fourteen stun ten ? Eh ? Good morning."

Squire Burdrop tossed up his tankard of old beer, put his hands deep in his front pockets, and stamped out. Silence fell on the company. The great events of the night were so uncertain and so unexpected that the Blue Bores could not yet realise what had happened. They could have made livelier conversation with smaller occurrences of a less conjectural nature and preferably of some years ago ; for slow wits talk best on the retrospect. They drifted one by one out of the Blue Boar bar to that place of gossiping only second to it, the Blue Boar porch. In the course of the morning, " pressure of business " relaxed sufficiently to permit Messrs. Ganthorn, Clinch and Trotman's attendance at a third place of gossip, namely the borough council chamber.

## VIII

Mr. Trotman was late for dinner. Mrs. Trotman would have liked Alec to begin without him, while there was still plenty of red gravy in the meat, but Alec pro-

tested more than filially, almost vehemently indeed, that he would much rather wait for his father. Then he went out of the house ; down to the Station Road. His pimply face was pale and worried, not to say scared. At five-and-twenty to two, by the new watch his mother had given him secretly, he whistled in a peculiar manner which, being interpreted, means, "Where the devil are you ? "

He would have liked to give also the other whistle : "Come, my love, I'm waiting for you."

Before long, Miss Jepp appeared at the side-door. "Well ? You must be quick, Mr. Trotman. They're earlier than most days. They've nearly finished, and the guvnor's as cross as two sticks."

Maybe her black dress of servitude, instead of the yellow costume of the day before, lowered Alec's spirits further than ever. "Have you seen the papers, Julie ?" he asked in a pitiful voice.

"Haven't had a chance. What's the matter ? They've been talking about an earthquake in London all the morning. Mrs. King was full of it when she came to try on her mantle."

"It's Ramshorn Hill. I've read it. It's killed a lot of people."

"Nonsense ! There weren't any on the Downs."

"In London, I mean.—Julie, what shall we do ? I don' know. They'll find us out and have us up for murder."

"*You* keep quiet . . ."

There was a noise, inside the house, of chairs scraping along a floor. Julia stood a moment listening, looked at Alec with tender, almost humorous interest, touched his arm, and exclaimed : "You've done it now ! "

"I can't . . ."

"I must go. They're on the move. Good-bye."

The door was shutting, Julia disappearing. Alec called her back despairingly : Julie, Julie ! D'you think it really was me ? ”

“ You ? ”

His voice sank to the utterly confidential. “ I've been trying to move a heap of bricks in the garden half the morning, and I can't ; not an inch.”

“ My word ! there's the guvnor calling me. Quick. Good-bye.”

The door shut finally. Julia was gone. Alec slouched home with his hands in his pockets, wearily. His native town seemed, as it were, strange to him.

The Mayor was home. Mrs. Trotman, on hearing the street-door open, came out into the passage and said very quietly : “ Wait till your father's finished. There's been a bother at the council—drains ! ”

Alec therefore hung about the shop and the passage. The female clerks were due back from their dinner. Miss Starkey, as usual, was the first to return. The other female clerks, those at the counter, who were perhaps slightly jealous, used to say that she 'bossed the place' and 'had the old man in tow.' Though her proper position was within the glass cash-box, or office, in the centre of the shop, she did not always stay there. A pale, anaemic, small woman, she knew how to wear her clothes better than the others, and Julia Jepp was accustomed to help her with the ideas of the before-mentioned leading London houses. Clever, impetuous, snappy, trustworthy ; the customers often asked for her to serve them ; just as they often passed the shop when His Worship was to be seen at the counter. Best of all, she could be left in charge of the Famous Grocery when its master left it for still more congenial surroundings, and its mistress dissained it. She knew the credit of most of the notabilities who lived in and around Trowbury. Mr. Trotman retained her services

not because he wanted to ; he did not ; but because she knew and did her work. He spoke of her as ‘a capable young person,’ a credit to himself ; and he hated her and all her abilities. A permanent quarrel smouldered between them.

Alec, since his *début* as a lady-killer, had found a hundred and one ways of aiding young women when before he would merely have watched their struggles with curiosity. He now offered to help Miss Starkey off with her jacket. That done, she swung the garment to and fro, looked him up and down smiling to herself the while (the foremost cause of Mr. Trotman’s dislike was her smile), and said airily : “ You’re looking very pale, Master Alec. Very ! ”

“ Am I ? D’you really think so ? ”

“ Look at your hand. Hold out your hand. There ; it’s trembling like as if you’d seen a ghost.”

“ Not really ? ”

“ Yes ’tis. Is it because you are going to leave your mammie ? ”

Irresolutely Alec replied, “ No.”

Miss Starkey’s voice was not unsympathetic. It was noticeable that most women, young or old, used a motherly tone in talking to Alexander Trotman.

“ Is it going away from its Julia then ? Hasn’t she weaned you properly ? Is that it ? ”

Alec blushed. “ No, it isn’t that, Miss Starkey.”

“ I believe it is. I’ll tell her so the next time I see her.”

“ It isn’t. Julie, Miss Jepp, ’ll tell you. Tell her I said she could.”

“ She’d tell me without your kind permission, Mr. Alec. We haven’t been friends all the time she’s been here for nothing. What is it ? Where did you go last night ? Tell me ! If you’ve done any harm to my Ju . . . ”

Mr. Trotman's voice was heard approaching. "I must clear out," said Miss Starkey.

Alec hesitated; then, out came his news. "Miss Starkey, promise you won't tell? I've moved Ramshorn Hill. Moved it away. The catastrophe in London. . . . Ask Julie."

A deep sepulchral voice of vast dignity broke in upon them. "Did I engage you, Miss Starkey, to talk to my son in the passage?—What are you doing here, Alec?"

"He only helped me off with my jacket."

"Don't answer *me* back."

"He's more of a gentleman than you are," said Miss Starkey under her breath, turning to go into the shop.

Mr. Trotman caught at her words:

"What's that? What did you say? I engaged you to do your work. . . ."

"And I've done it."

"I've heard quite enough of your goings-on after shop hours. You're a thoroughly fast young woman; that's what you are. You'll go from here; you're not fit to be in a respectable establishment. Mrs. Trotman . . ."

"That faded old cat!"

"Silence! Your father died of drink. *I* know."

"He didn't."

"He did."

"He didn't. 'Tis my stepfather drinks. My father was a good man."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"You devil! I wish . . ."

Mr. Trotman drew himself up like an offended goose. "You'll take your money and go this instant.—Go and have your dinner, Alec, immediately!"

Mrs. Trotman cut off for her son a couple of slices from the juiciest part of the joint. "What is it now?"

she inquired. Mr. Trotman entered the room and poured out for himself a stiffish glass of whiskey.

"I've sent Miss Starkey going with her pay."

"A good job too," said Mrs. Trotman.

The Mayor took a deep draught of his whiskey. "I did all right," he said, "to engage her by the week instead of by the month. She might have claimed a month's pay. But she wouldn't have got it."

"She doesn't deserve it," said Mrs. Trotman.

He heard the unfortunate girl's footsteps in the passage. Putting his head round the door, he shouted, "Be off my premises at once!"

"She's no better than she ought to be," he remarked to his wife.

"Sh!" said his wife.

## IX

Looking backwards, it is at first sight astonishing how little commotion Monday morning's news made in the small and presumably dull town of Trowbury. Ramshorn Hill had totally disappeared—so it was said. And there had been a terrible catastrophe in London, which involved the sudden appearance of a high hill on the outskirts of the metropolis, and the sudden disappearance of a few families whose manner of death was their only claim to notice.

But why should Trowbury have been greatly moved while events remained outside it? To a hungry man his dinner is of more importance than eternal life: to Trowbury, which had its bread and cheese to earn, its little kindnesses to do and its petty malice to expend, unimportant business was more important than something conjectural on the Downs and a hubbub in newspapers, whose every fact was conjectural. Besides, the

*Halfpenny Press*, even in its more truthful days, had never greatly moved Trowbury ; and there, O Trowbury, didst thou show thy superiority—thy true sleepy Moonraker immobility.

A few energetic and curious people decided to make up driving parties to the Downs. Several clerks and shop assistants, effectually tied till after hours, planned their next cycle ride. The actual life of Trowbury flowed on as usual ; like a river of treacle with flies stuck in it, and little eddies of alcohol here and there.

Mr. Ganthorn was the only eminent local personage who deliberately altered his daily round, his common task, of earning an income on the minimum of work. It might have been observed that he was on the *qui vive* ; but then he always was on the *qui vive*, and to no end that any one ever saw. For all his loud scepticism, he constantly put himself in the way of hearing news, which, since it came from only one source, the farming people around Ramshorn Hill, presented itself to him as many different versions of the same tale.

He was, though few knew it, the unworthy local correspondent of the *Halfpenny Press* ; unworthy, because he could never learn the second of the local correspondent's two commandments :

1. Thou shalt send no news to any paper but ours.
2. Thou shalt send the news at once and find out afterwards whether it is true or not.

He could never get into his head that time equals circulation and that the possibility is greater than the reality—things axiomatic to the born journalist. Therefore he wasted his time in seeking truth until the *Evening Press* arrived from London. Then he was put upon his mettle.

The *Evening Press* not only contained headlines to which the *Halfpenny Press*'s headlines were as visiting cards ; not only contained the versions of spectators

and an interview with a member of one of the ill-fated families, who happened on the memorable night to be nowhere near the scene of the catastrophe ; not only contained the non-committal opinions of several distinguished scientists and the irrelevant empiricisms of a Leading Physician of Harley Street ;—it contained, most wonderful of all, a report that there had been a seismic disturbance in Wiltshire, communicated (said Ganthorn to himself) by that damn'd officious local correspondent at Marlborough.

The *Evening Press* queried, asserted and denied some connection between the two occurrences.

Ganthon set to work. He started with a brandy and soda at the Blue Boar, wasted half an hour in trying to get through on the telephone, and finally rushed off to the telegraph office just before closing time. His urgent telegram did not reach the *Halfpenny Press* until after the last down train had left Paddington Station.

Trowbury and its news was, for one more night, cut off from the world.

## X

On the Tuesday morning, the news began to make no little stir even in Trowbury. The *Halfpenny Press*, with its mighty headlines and heavily leaded columns, its many versions, all different, and its impressive theories and opinions, all contradictory, impressed upon the mind of Trowbury that it was really becoming more famous than it already thought itself. The *Penny Press* and the twopenny *Times* deepened the impression in their own comparatively platitudinous and stodgy ways respectively. Above all, the adventurous spirits who had cycled and driven to the Downs the previous evening, brought back fearful tales of a yawning gulf, an

abyssm, where Ramshorn Hill had formerly stood. What with the Downs and London, Trowbury became decidedly confused. Men said, "Queer!" and explained the thing away. Women said, "How dreadful!" and while assuming the news was true, hoped it wasn't so.

Alderman Trotman read his newspaper, gave forth his worshipful opinions over his bacon and eggs, repeated his unalterable determination that Alec should inevitably leave home on the Thursday, and directed him to begin packing forthwith. "And don't go bothering your mother," said the father. "She's got quite enough to do for me." Business called him, and he went off to the Blue Boar.

A stranger arrived at the Blue Boar by the first train from London, and inquired after Mr. Ganthorn and Mr. Ganthorn's house. Though he asked many questions, more especially about Ramshorn Hill, nobody was able to draw out of him any information about himself. Therefore the Blue Bores, according to their custom, said that he was a little bounder on no good business at all.

At the side-window he ordered a soda and milk. Soon, Alderman Trotman, who was arguing upon, or rather expressing his opinion of, the morning's news, took up his glass and strolled round to the side-window, ostensibly to look at the clock and at a railway timetable.

"Beautiful weather," said he to the stranger. "A fine outlook for the harvest."

"Yes, beautiful weather."

"Trade has looked up this season in London. The Court always makes trade more brisk."

"So I believe."

"Commercial gentlemen, I hear, have booked good orders in the provinces."

"Is that so?"

Mr. Trotman placed his glass on the counter beside the stranger's. "A temperance lecturer, sir? I can't say I'm exactly a teetotaler. Moderation in all things. . . . You intend to lecture here? It is unfortunate the Town Hall assembly-room is under repair. . . ."

"No, sir," said the stranger, removing his silk hat and mopping his forehead with the fairest of white linen handkerchiefs. The like of his silky frock-coat might have been seen any Sunday in Trowbury, but the cut of it was obviously metropolitan. "No, sir; I'm neither a commercial traveller nor a temperance lecturer."

"No offence. . . ."

"Not in the least. I want to find a Mr. Ganthorn. They told me I should be sure to find him here."

"Ah! Unfortunately he is busy to-day with a very important audit, or he would have been here about this time. The Trowbury Sausage Company—one of our local industries. I am a considerable buyer from them, also a shareholder. Sound stuff."

"I want to see Mr. Ganthorn or, in fact, anybody who can tell me about the hill which is said to have disappeared, and the best way of getting there."

"I haven't been there myself yet," said Mr. Trotman, "but I can give you a good deal of information, or get it for you. You have seen the *Halfpenny Press*? You are . . ."

"I am a special correspondent from the *Halfpenny Press*."

"Oh, indeed, sir! No doubt we could arrange to let you have the surveyor's motor-car if it's not under repair. I'm afraid it is though. Will you come up to my house in Castle Street and have a snack? Pot luck, you know. I am James Trotman, at your service. Mayor, this year. . . . The proper person to come to."

## XI

On that same Tuesday morning, the Blue Boar very nearly lost its position as the centre of events and Trowbury's fount of action. In a cottage under the Downs, a small old woman turned out of her bed, queerly half-dressed. She lighted a lamp, brewed herself a cup of tea, and set to work to shave her upper lip and chin. With a ragged blue shawl over her slip-bodice and a candle beside the looking-glass (the blind was carefully tucked against the window) she scraped away most patiently. She cut herself, mopped the place and put on a piece of spider's web to stop the bleeding. It was, indeed, precisely for that purpose that she allowed spiders to spin in one corner of her clean little bedroom.

At length, with crowing exclamations and a deep sigh, the shaving came to an end. Mrs. Parfitt poured herself out another cup of black tea and furtively, though she was all alone, she laced it with a few drops of the Famous Grocer's Fine Old Liqueur Whiskey. She sat down to three slices of bread and butter; thought better of it, and finished up the meat from a pork bone as well. Then she fetched a black skirt and a black bodice with jet on it from a lavender-scented chest of drawers that stood in a dry place near her kitchen fire. She went down on her knees and drew from under the bed a box containing a black bonnet with a pink rose in it. She adjusted all these things on herself with care and much shaking. She put on her boots, exclaiming at their discomfort, blew out the lamp, and was ready.

An important purpose shone through all the little old woman's trembling movements.

She was going to Trowbury.

But first of all she climbed up to Squire Burdrop's

head-shepherd's cottage. Mrs. Merritt was scolding and feeding her children.

"I jest thought as I'd go into Trowbury an' tell 'em about it," said Mrs. Parfitt. "After what your man told 'ee last night about they lambs gone, 'tisn't right but they should know."

"No, that 'tisn't, Mrs. Parfitt.—Merritt, he be gone out for to have a last look, and I be so caddled wi' these here little varmints I don't know which way to turn, or I'd take and go in 'long with 'ee."

"I see as you be busy, my dear.—Well, I'll come and tell 'ee all about it when I d' get back. You an't found no more lambs lost?"

"Not as I knows of."

"Well, good marnin' to 'ee."

Mrs. Parfitt trudged into Trowbury as fast as her aged legs could carry her. She moralised to herself on the coming-in of motor-cars, standing stock still, even in the footpath, till each one had passed her. She could not help enjoying the delightful freshness of the July morning, but her old-fashioned greeting, "Beautiful marnin' that 'tis," was unheeded by many of the passers-by. The sun came out. The road dried up with cloudlets of vapour hovering over its surface. It was, after all, a hot dusty dishevelled old woman, holding her skirts high above her elastic-side boots, who tottered down Castle Street, turned as if frightened into the Famous Grocery Establishment, sat down on the nearest counter chair, and said to one of the female clerks : "Tell Mrs. Trotman, my dear, as I be come."

"Who shall I say, madam?"

"Why, bless me, my dear! Tell her 'tis me—Nurse—Mrs. Parfitt."

Before Nurse Parfitt had finished mopping, flicking and arranging herself, the female clerk returned. "Will you please step inside? This way."

" All right, my dear. Don't 'ee trouble. I know'd the way afore you was born."

The parlour was empty. As before mentioned, Mrs. Trotman's morning costume was apt to preserve only the shreds and jewellery of the previous night's elegance. And morning or afternoon, she could not get out of the habit, when a visitor was announced, of rushing upstairs to have a look at herself. Now, though it was only old Nurse Parfitt, Mrs. Trotman was obliged to run away and, as she would have said, to titivate a little.

When she did open the parlour door, with washed hands and a coatee drawn on over her blouse, she exclaimed in tones of the gladdest and most hospitable surprise : " Why, Nurse ! "

With a hearty " Good marnin', my dear ; how be 'ee ? " Mrs. Parfitt rose up and kissed her. She commented on the weather, as if she had joy in it, but also a secret underlying grief ; as if

God's in His heaven,  
All's right with the world,

but the devil is main active all the same. Then she stopped to take breath.

" Have you heard anything about this Ramshorn Hill ? " Mrs. Trotman took the opportunity of asking.

" That's just what I come in for to tell 'ee," Mrs. Parfitt replied conspirator-wise, " only I'm blest if I knows where to begin."

" Will you take a little wine and biscuit, Nurse ? "

" There ! I don't mind if I do—just a teeny drop, if you please. You know, my dear, I d' always say as your husband's wine is the best as ever I've a-tasted—so nice and sweet—I can almost taste the grapes in it, I can."

Wine, biscuits, and cake, therefore, were set forth

according to the good old Wiltshire custom which allows no visitor to depart unrefreshed. Mrs. Parfitt postponed the telling of her news until she had drunk a couple of glassfuls of wine and had eaten some shop cake. She was awaiting the dramatic moment, and meanwhile she beat about the bush garrulously. Finally, after some more remarks on the weather and the sadness of things in general, she laid a wrinkled discoloured hand on Mrs. Trotman's.

Though the Mayoress drew her hand away, the old woman was too full of her tale to notice it. "I shouldn't have come in all this way to tell 'ee, my dear," she said, "and I'm sure I didn't know what I was a-saying of when I promised him and Miss Jepp that I'd say nothing about it; but two o' Squire Burdrop's best lambs—his very best, so the shepherd's wife d' say—two o' they be clean gone, and 'twouldn't let me rest in my bed, and *that's* why I be come in to tell 'ee."

Mrs. Trotman was leaning forward and trying to get a word in edgeways. "Miss Jepp, Ramshorn Hill, Mr. Burdrop's lambs. . . . What *do* you mean, Nurse? Alec wasn't there?"

In the course of half an hour's fast talking Mrs. Parfitt succeeded in explaining, as far as she could, the events of the previous Sunday evening. She nodded her head so violently that her bonnet bobbed up and down. Besides laying particular stress on Squire Burdrop's lambs as her reason for breaking the secret, she was quite sure that the chill of the evening, or the shock of the hill's disappearance, had made Alec ill, so that, after all, he had not quite known what he was saying, and he had not really moved the hill. In thus trying to shield her Allie, she completely muddled his mother.

Mrs. Trotman rang the bell.

"Tell Master Alec to come here at once."

Alexander appeared. The strain of the last two days

had told on him shockingly. He looked altogether crushed, flabby and frightened, as if a ghost had boxed his ears. Nurse Parfitt burst out : " La Master Allie ! La ! I know'd you was ill. Poor dear !" She even forgot to try and kiss him.

" What is this about you and Miss Jepp and Rams-horn Hill ? " his mother asked sternly in a tolerable imitation of her husband's sepulchral voice. " Were you on the Downs with *her* last Sunday night ? Tell me."

Alec's eyes shifted about the room. He did not answer and his mother began again. She could be very severe with her beloved Alexander in a case of sweet-hearting.

" Nurse says you know something about the disappearance of Ramshorn Hill and Mr. Burdrop's two lambs. Were you up there ? Tell me—at once ! Who were you with ? "

" I moved Ramshorn Hill," said Alec faintly. " It went."

He was shifting his hands in and out of his pockets.

" What ? I don't understand. I shall ask your father to look into this. Miss Jepp indeed ! "

The strain and attempted secrecy were too much. Alec reddened. After a preliminary snuffle or two, he sat down, laid his head on his arms, and bood like a child. Nurse Parfitt toddled over to him. She put her arms around him ; gathered him to her in the old nursery fashion. " There, there, Allie dearie ! Never you mind.—I told you the poor child was ill, Mrs. Trotman. Your own son, it is ! "

Mrs. Trotman was helpless. Though she could and did look after her son's stomach, she was at sea with his emotions. He did not seem to need feeding this time. What else could she do ? On going out of the room to fetch smelling-salts and brandy, she met her husband and the Halfpenny Pressman.

"Sh! Alec is not very well. Don't go in there."

"Well, but Mister . . . I didn't quite catch your name, sir, Mister . . ."

"Fulton—John Fulton."

"Mr. Fulton, my better half.—Mr. Fulton has come up for a little lunch. What have you got?"

"You know what we've got."

"Do I, indeed! Ah, well, we have two larders here, my wife's for me and my own on sale. Pot luck, you know. We can camp out. Pot luck in your trade, no doubt. . . ."

Mr. Trotman always received a guest with jollity.

## XII

Mrs. Trotman showed her husband and his guest upstairs, whisked some clothing away from the sofa, and left them to admire that masterpiece of her elegant predilections, her own drawing-room.

It was marvellously furnished. An exceptionally heavy round couch, upholstered in yellow, green and red flowered chintz, occupied the centre of the room. The wall was covered with small mirrors which had flowers and butterflies painted on them, and with pictures of wild scenery, painted as much like oleographs as possible to suit the English taste. Deep arm-chairs and silken seats on enamelled sticks; a solid mahogany sideboard with art muslin wings; a carpet of tropical luxuriance and an airily painted ceiling; a large black marble clock with bronze horsemen flanked by bits of Worcester china; formed a series of contrasts which symbolised—though she didn't realise it—her own life and that of her celebrated son. The two windows looked out on

the busy traffic of Castle Street. Taste and commerce were cheek by jowl.

The Mayor and the Halfpenny Pressman were left together. How the one chafed at the polite informative discourse of the other, yet stayed because it was his business to watch and write, ought to be written in a National Dictionary of Journalistic Biography, advertised by Americans, and distributed over the entire world on the instalment system.

Presently, however, Mrs. Trotman put her head round the door and with grimaces full of meaning called her husband from the room. She whispered that into his ear which caused him to snort as loudly as politeness permitted and then to send imperiously for his son and Mrs. Parfitt.

After Alec had been up to his bedroom and had washed his eyes, there began in the drawing-room that revelation which shook the press, convulsed the sects, and quite definitely disturbed the saner portions of the nation. Chiefly owing to Mrs. Parfitt, it took as near as possible two hours and ten minutes. Miss Jepp was sent for—and was unable to come. Mr. Clinch was requested, with the Mayor's compliments, to send the said Miss Jepp to the Famous Grocery—and sent her. Miss Starkey absolutely refused to appear, even on being promised that her outrageous conduct should be overlooked ; which was in the Trotmans' opinion exceedingly ungrateful. She sent such a rude message, in fact, that the Mayor felt certain her evidence would be absolutely worthless. The Halfpenny Pressman talked himself into a sweat, and his shorthand notes, that he jotted down as soon as possible afterwards, read somewhat thus :—

“ Mayor (bumptious old fool) has son about twenty (poor-looking specimen : bit off). Last Sunday, son and his girl (handsome girl : local draper's assistant)

went to church and then cycled and walked to Ramshorn Hill. They assert (seem to be speaking the truth) that son wished Ramshorn Hill in London, for reasons of his own (query : what reasons precisely ? Can't get it out of the idiot). Hill did disappear about the same time as catastrophe in Acton. Queer. Son and girl very frightened. Should think so. Swear secrecy. Go straight and tell old nurse (terrible ancient with a tongue).

“ Monday, son tells a Miss Starkey, lately in his father's shop (bit of a tartar by her message and the Trotmans' opinion). Ramshorn Hill found gone. News of Acton affair reaches Trowbury by *Halfpenny Press*. Nobody seems to have connected the two. Dull people round here.

“ Tuesday, old nurse comes to Trowbury and breaks secrecy because local squire lost a couple of lambs when hill disappeared. Couple of dead sheep *were* found on the Acton Hill. Queer again.

“ Tale fits like a Chinese puzzle (mem.—*the* phrase that). Must be something in it. Nurse's evidence of Sunday evening, and entire ignorance of Acton catastrophe, conclusive. Perfect corroboration and no possibility of collusion.

“ Q.E.D. Son must have moved the hill. Girl certain he did, though she denied it till he said he did. Is he mediumistic ? ”

“ Good haul, this.”

At a quarter to three the Halfpenny Pressman sent a very long telegram to his head-quarters. “ You know the penalty, I suppose, for divulging telegraphic messages,” he said to the counter clerk in the Post Office. “ *Not exceeding one year's imprisonment.*”

Just after three o'clock the Mayor, the Mayoress, Alec, Miss Jepp, Nurse Parfitt and the Halfpenny Pressman sat down to a lunch of burnt beefsteak and onion and

tinned eatables, followed by stuff from the pastry-cook's and some of the Famous Grocer's best Anglo-American cheese.

"I always knew," said Alderman James Trotman, first magistrate of Trowbury, "that my son had it in him to do something, though whether it would come out or not I could not tell, of course. What's bred in the bone, you know. . . . Take some wine, Alec, won't you? and pass it on."

### XIII

Later in the afternoon the Halfpenny Pressman found waiting for him at the Post Office a telegram which caused him to say with a saddened savageness: "The idiots never can leave a poor devil to do anything on his own!" He bought a cap and a one-inch ordnance map of the district. He took a hasty uncomfortable tea at the pastrycook's. He hired a bicycle. Then, with his coat-tails carefully arranged on either side of the back wheel, he cycled out of the town, towards the Downs. The road was so bad, owing to the driving of sheep over it, that, in trying to ride without the handle-bars while he compared the map with the surrounding country, he very nearly fell, silky coat and all, into the dust. So he rode on, putting his trust in fortune rather than maps. When he came to the open road—and a very inharmonious object he looked upon it—he gazed around him once more, and once more unfolded the map. He stopped a labourer going home from work.

"Where is it that—that the hill was?" he asked.

"Ay?"

"Where is it that the hill went away from?"

"Oh, ay! You d' mean the hill as went—got losted

like. Ramshorn Hill they calls it, wi' a dewpond on the top. Won'erful thing, that ! Wer' is 'er ? Now look you here. If you d' go along the road till you d' come to the third milestone, from Trowbury that is, you can see the top o' the hill vrom just there. Leastways, you could zee 'em, vor I've a-zeen Squire Burdrop's shepherd a-eating his dinner on it when I been crackin' stones hereabout."

Of all this, the Halfpenny Pressman caught practically nothing except the words 'third milestone.' He remounted his bicycle, and with something very like despair in his soul he made towards the place where the hill should have been. Then he dismounted, examined the map again, and decided from the contour lines that the hill ought to be visible from where he was. If not . . . But it was not. The telegram, however, and the rough road had for the moment clouded his interest in the whole matter. He threw his cap on the bank, sat down, gathered his coat-tails into his lap, and lighted a cheroot.

Very curious—as curious as a mummy in a modern glass case—did he look, squatting in his silky black clothes among dusty grass tufts, and cornflowers whose blueness nothing seems able to sully. The light evening winds, sometimes smelling of the crops, sometimes of the dusty road, just chilled his half-bald pate. The magic of the Downs gripped him. Where he was, there he seemed to have been always. He forgot how the people at head-quarters were about to snatch a good haul out of his hands. He reverted to his youthful days when such a thing as the *Halfpenny Press* had neither sullied, nor become the instrument of his dreams of success. He thought of his two children growing up pale-faced in the inner ring of London's suburbs ; he swore a little more, then felt inclined to pray, and then meditated on his health. He even called to mind his dead re-

lations ; conjured up the face of his deceased mother. His eyes moistened. The Downs stripped his soul and left it naked ; left it shivering indeed. A spot in the midst of their long heaving lines, their far-off noises and their beautiful clear dry lights—their immemorial spaciousness—he was so small as to be almost great.

Twilight came on slowly. Tobacco took precedence over deceased kinsfolk. The Halfpenny Pressman peered up the road till his eyes ached. Nothing moved on it except a bird or two and a hare. Then suddenly, as if by an optical illusion, the road became transformed into the likeness of a monstrous snake, with two bright eyes, winding down the hills. The resemblance was uncanny. But the professional side of the Halfpenny Pressman was now uppermost. He stepped into the centre of the road. He waved his handkerchief. A six-cylinder motor-car—the head of the snake—slowed down.

“Fulton ?”

“Yes.”

“Anything fresh ?”

“No. . . . Yes. The evidence. . . .”

“Where is the hill ?”

“That’s where it was, there.”

“Nothing to see ?”

“Only a big hollow, they say.”

“Haven’t you been there then ?”

“No time.”

“H’m ! See you again. Got a bicycle there, haven’t you ? Where does that Mayor live ?”

“The grocery shop in the middle of Castle Street. Impossible to miss it.”

With a sustained hum, the motor-car sped on to the Famous Grocery Establishment.

Fulton hastened after them, denouncing to the hills the abrupt ways of the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*,

who rode—so he put it—over the mangled bodies of starved and disappointed journalists.

At all events, the phrase had a fine journalistic ring. The Halfpenny Pressman felt the happier for it.

## XIV

The Mayor of Trowbury received the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*—famous, wealthy, powerful and notorious, *and* a baronet—whose motor-car could not have cost a penny less than a thousand pounds. A point, that, for the Blue Bores!

Sir Pushcott Bingley was humbly and proudly pressed to take a little supper at the Famous Grocery—‘pot-luck, plain food but the best’—and Mrs. Trotman was set cooking her utmost, the Famous Grocer himself fetching from the shop several delicacies which she knew not in the least how to use. In support of his invitation, Mr. Trotman mentioned jovially that the cook ‘at our antient hostelry’ had just been discharged for drunkenness, that the kitchenmaid was far from fit to take her place in cooking for gentlemen, and that the whiskey there was not so mature as formerly. He promised all the aid that the Mayor of Trowbury could give towards elucidating the mystery of Ramshorn Hill. He had, indeed, some very important, some most important, information. They would discuss the matter. . . .

The Director prepared to make the best of a bad job, to remain at the Famous Grocery for supper; but he decided that nothing should induce him to sleep the night in a house which, to tell the truth, smelt more than the least bit cheesy and fusty.

Meanwhile, high-falutin tragedy was working itself up in another part of the town—in a small back upstairs room of a small house in Augustine Terrace.

When Miss Starkey had been dismissed from her situation at the Famous Grocery, she walked aimlessly to the bottom of Castle Street, full of indignation against ‘old Trotman and all his beastly place.’ Then with a sudden revulsion from rage to self-pity, she found herself weeping and went quickly home. She sat down on her bed and looked out of the window, at a red-brick wall with tufts of grass growing in its unpointed crevices. She got up and walked about the room, touching things. It was a neat clean little place, its prevailing colour drab—a tint beloved of landladies because, even when it cries for washing, it doesn’t show it. An oil-stove in the fender and a spirit lamp on the washstand denoted at once the bachelor’s or spinster’s apartment. But the most noticeable, the only really striking thing about the room was the pictures. Besides a faded photograph of a consumptive-looking man with fluffy side-whiskers (Miss Starkey’s father), and a text or two about God’s love, supplied by the landlady, the walls were decorated entirely by pictures of classical statuary and paintings. “A nasty naked lot!” the landlady called them.

After gazing for some time at nothing in particular, Miss Starkey dried her eyes, took a dose of *sal volatile*, arrayed herself before the glass, and walked out to Clinch’s Emporium. Making straight for Miss Jepp’s counter, she bought twopennyworth of black hat-elastic, and whispered: “I want you after shop. Come round. Old Trotman’s sent me going. I’ll tell you this evening.”

Miss Jepp looked startled.

“All right. . . .”

“You come round,” Miss Starkey repeated with a

grim catch in her voice not unmixed with a certain note of triumph, " and I'll tell you *everything!* "

An eavesdropping male assistant was edging near. Miss Starkey tossed her head and went out

## XV

Women like Julia Jepp run in where angels keep aloof. Yet even she might not have gone to her friend's lodging had she known what was in store for her. Miss Starkey was waiting, leaning over the bannister, on the dingy little landing. " Oh, Julie ! It's quarter to nine. I thought you weren't coming." A squeak in the voice at *nine*, and a little snuffle at the end, warned Julia that tears were not far off. She opened her arms, so motherly for her age and occupation, and led Miss Starkey into the little room. It was in darkness, except for the sickly reflection of the moonlight. Lighting the smoky lamp did but increase the atmosphere of something impending. Long afterwards Julia shivered slightly at the smell of an ill-cleaned lamp.

Edith Starkey began her tale of woe :

" He turned me out at dinner-time with a week's wages. He was in an *awful* temper."

" What for ? With you, dear ? "

" Yes, I think. . . . I don't know. Not at first. Anyhow, he sent me going, and he stayed hanging about to see that I went. He said dreadful things. Just like he does when he's . . . "

" But what for, Edie ? "

" Yes," said Edith Starkey, continuing her own tale. " And Julie . . . I don't know what to do ! I don't a bit. There's Mother. . . . That old beast, Trotman, said my father was I don't know what, and I called him

a devil. I did ! I could have *hit* him. But he wasn't so far wrong. My stepfather is, anyhow. That's it. He's a bigger beast than old Trotman. I haven't told you ever. . . . Listen ! He's nearly always in liquor. And he doesn't allow Mother any money, except to buy food for him to eat, and she has to have his leavings—sometimes he won't let her sit down to table with him,—and if I hadn't sent her money—I used to post it to a shop near our house,—she wouldn't have had anything at all for herself. And now I shan't be able to any more. She won't have anything—not a penny—not enough to eat. Oh, Julie, I don't know what to do ! ”

Edith Starkey was more than snuffling now ; she had her handkerchief out and was blowing her nose vigorously.

“ You must try and get Mr. Trotman to take you back,” Julia suggested.

“ He won't. I called him too much when he told his lies about my father.”

“ Perhaps he will. What was it all about ? ”

“ He found me in the passage talking to Alec.”

“ Oh. . . .”

“ Alec was only helping me off with my jacket. He's such a polite boy. We hadn't been talking a minute.”

“ Really ! ” Julia's characteristic *really*.

“ Oh, Julie, don't you believe me ? ”

Julia became aware that she had been hardening her heart. She softened.

“ Yes, my dear, of course I believe you. But if that's all, Mr. Trotman 'll be sure to have you back—when he's in a better temper. Just you try, dear.”

“ It's no good if I did,” Miss Starkey wailed. “ I should have to go soon.”

“ Perhaps someone else will give you a berth.”

“ That wouldn't be any good either. I should have

to go from them as well. Mother won't get any more clean money from me. *Julie!*"

Miss Starkey sprang up from the bed with a strange gesture of pride and abasement. She put her arms round Julia's neck and whispered. . . .

Did she indeed whisper? Julia found herself aware of something, yet with no recollection, no echo, of speech in her ears. "Oh, Edie!" she exclaimed. There was an indefinite, undirected note of anger in her voice.

Miss Starkey drew away and stood in the middle of the room like a weeping child waiting to have some clothes tried on.

"Yes, that's it!" she said.

"You haven't been and got married secretly?"

"No—I—haven't! Can't you understand. I ought to."

"Edie! How *could* you? And not tell me?"

"Tell *you*!"

Miss Starkey laughed through her sobs.

Julia was very white in the face. With effort she controlled herself lest she should lose her head and weep too. Though she seemed to be thinking deeply, she was in reality much more like a piece of blotting paper into which ink has soaked; which is not yet dry, but still wet, soft, and easily to be broken. She would have liked a good cry there and then.

But Miss Starkey had to be considered. She sat down on the bed once more. For a time everything was quiet, except for her sobbing and the meg-meg of voices downstairs and the wauling of cats in the back-yard. Then she began to talk in a machine-like wail that mingled with the voices of the cats, like a sad and thoughtful echo of their savage feline love-making.

"Don't look at me like that, Julie. I was so lonely. I'd have given anything—anything, for just a kiss like

most girls. I couldn't help it. I used to look in the glass and think how old I was looking. He talked nice to me. You don't know how lonely I was. And I hadn't any money to go anywhere because I'd sent it all to Mother. I only had you for a friend, and since you've taken up with Alec Trotman . . . I used to come home after shop and make some tea and sit down and look at my pictures—and then I couldn't sleep for thinking. And I'm anaemic, you know. I dreaded looking at myself, I was so peeky and old. I thought I should go off my head. Mad ! So I went out, like the rest of them, instead of keeping myself to myself.—Julie ! What are you looking at me like that for ? Julie ! ”

“ Who was it got you into trouble ? Who was it betrayed you ? ”

The language of these young ladies is none the less sincere because, on high occasions, it resembles that of the novelettes they are accustomed to read.

“ Who was it, dear ? ” Julia asked again.

“ 'Twas . . . No, I shan't tell *you*.—Julie, don't look like that.”

Miss Starkey roared with laughter.

“ I shall bear a son and he shall be called Unwanted ! —No, we'll call him James Alexander Trotman Starkey, Son of Loneliness and Bad Luck. It wasn't my fault, Julie.” (Here she cried.) “ 'Twas the Trotmans' fault ; the horrid old father and the pimply-faced fool of a son ! Julie, don't look ! ” (And here she laughed again.) “ I'll take my baby down the town, dressed in white, in a green mailcart with a leather hood. And people will say, ‘ There she goes ! ’ and perhaps they'll pity me then. I shan't be lonely any more. A baby's better than an old maid's cat.”

Miss Starkey was flinging herself round the room. She cried and laughed together. She knocked over the

lamp, which went out. Julia, gathering up the pieces of glass, saw her white face by the moonlight, and her mouth opening and shutting, like a shadow-show on the wall, as she gabbled and laughed. It seemed as if the mouth had no connection with the voice that filled the room.

"Mother, Mother!" she called out, twitching and twisting like someone poisoned with strychnine or dying of lockjaw. "Julie . . . I've heard a clergyman say that our friends in heaven can see us, what we do. Do you think my father saw me—then? Julie, speak! Did he? I wonder what he thought. . . ."

She burst into laughter.

"Sh, sh!" went Julia. "The landlady will hear."

"I don't care. Mother! Father! Mother! God! God! Everybody!"

A scream.

Julia forced her to lie down and undid her collar; slapped her, scolded her, and poured cold water on her, after the manner, approved in drapery establishments, of treating hysterical young women. "Who was it, Edie?" she asked, being full of suspicion.

Miss Starkey was not so far gone but she could catch at her friend's meaning. It needs knowledge of the depths of the hysterical mind to explain why she raved on: "'Tis the Trotmans who've ruined me—Trotman father and Trotman son! Cursèd be the house of Trotman! I hate the old man, and I hate his son, and I hate—oh, I hate—that old cat, Mrs. Trotman. If I kill myself, say it was the Trotmans made me.—Julie!"

But she was beginning to calm down. Physical exhaustion was gaining the upper hand. The muscular contortions subsided to a tremor, the strident voice and wild laughter to a dull muttering. Julia would have gone, had not pity, and an aching curiosity, kept her. Julia was a good woman. She suffered, perhaps, greater

pain than her friend. But she wanted to know, to know. . . . If she could only know.

"Was it Alec Trotman?" she asked.

"I didn't say so," and a sly cruel smile was the only reply.

Restraining an impulse to bully a plain acknowledgement of the truth out of Miss Starkey, she calmed her until sleep came, and then only did she leave the lodging-house—to face the infliction of a one shilling fine for being late in at the Emporium.

"Is Miss Starkey ill, Miss?" asked the landlady as Julia went downstairs.

"Yes. But she's asleep now. Don't disturb her, please."

"Nothing very serious, Miss?"

Julia pretended not to hear. Nevertheless, the landlady had overheard enough to go upstairs, awaken Miss Starkey, and give her a week's notice to quit a respectable house.

This proceeding had the most beneficent effect possible in bringing that young lady to her senses.

## XVI

The supper at Alderman Trotman's was a great and memorable success. A real Sir—The Director of the *Halfpenny Press*—Sir Pushcott Bingley, Bart.—was their guest. It made them feel as if they were, and always had been, in the centre of the world's affairs. Certainly he was rather short with Mrs. Trotman's string of ladylike social sayings and with the Mayor's disquisition on how the Council ought to act, and ought not to have acted, for a progressive Trowbury. But what could the Trotmans do, other than follow the conversational lead of so honourable a guest, who made

himself so thoroughly at ease in their happy humble home ; who was, as for months afterwards Mrs. Trotman said, *such* a gentleman ?

He began by interrogating them like a smiling Old Bailey barrister. He sauced his meat with questions and washed it down with replies. He even prevented the Mayor from answering questions addressed to Alec. That in itself is a most convincing testimony to his genius, for no one else had ever succeeded in making Alderman Trotman hold his tongue.

When the Halfpenny Pressman entered, just as they were nibbling cheese, Sir Pushcott turned to him and remarked pleasantly : "There's something in it, Fulton."

"I was sure of it from the first," said the Halfpenny Pressman.

"You had better go and get a little rest. I shall want you at the hotel at ten o'clock and you will go up to town in my car."

Fulton retired. The conversation went on.

The Trotman family had never seen its head in so genial a mood. His waistcoat bulged ; his eyes twinkled ; his bilious complexion flushed with colour. One end of his moustache looked heavenward, and the other end looked the other way. It was *My son this, My son that, I this, I that, I something else, I, I, I.* And Mrs. Trotman succeeded in telling Sir Pushcott what trouble she had had with Alexander's stomach.

The table was cleared, the whiskey decanter being left upon it. "'Fine old liqueur, guaranteed twelve years old,' Sir Pushcott," said the Famous Grocer. "You will do me the honour of taking a glass ? "

Then an unprecedented thing happened. Sir Pushcott Bingley was seldom in his life tricked into showing his cards ; he played them instead ; but on this occasion . . . The Mayor's decanter held one of those clever blended whiskeys which are soft and clear to the palate,

but treacherous in the drinking ; whiskeys which get into a man's head unawares and cause him to surprise himself. *In vino veritas* is especially true of such liquor. No more than one glassful will sometimes render a man visibly true to himself. So, perhaps, it was with Sir Pushcott Bingley after supper. Whether his journalistic haul, or his exhilarating ride across the Downs, or Trowbury air, or his tiredness, aided the whiskey cannot be determined. At all events, he lay back in Mr. Trotman's own arm-chair and stretched his long legs across the rug. He ruffled his hair, his eyes brightened, and his dark thin face lighted up. As he talked he became, so to speak, an ordinary man astonished at the great exploits of one Sir Pushcott Bingley. Therefore, to the Mayor's respectful questions, he gave replies both gracious and cynical. He spoke like a man so assuredly successful that he can afford to pick holes in the means of his own success.

"I can remember," said the Mayor, rolling a banded cigar between his lips, "when the Press was very different to what it is now. In my young days we had newspapers for every shade of opinion, but nowadays they all seem to be on one side. At least, all the go-ahead papers do."

"Yes," replied Sir Pushcott. "All on the side of the angels. Eh ? As a matter of fact there are no real parties. Liberalism and Conservatism are obsolete. There is the party in, and the party out ; and not a pin's difference between them, except in their names and election cries. Of course, there is the Labour Party, but in trying to manage Labour they have succeeded in representing anything except labourers ; nothing except themselves ; they are negligible. The Press is party. First the Press puts one side in and then the other side. Parties have become simply the machinery —and a deuced clumsy one at that—by which the Press

rules the country. The electorate, it is true, decides upon some quibble or other which party shall go in next; but it is the Press that invents the quibble. In point of fact, I, as Director of the *Halfpenny Press*, I am the true, free, independent and democratic voter. I am the real ruler. I am like the trusty butler of an old and fussy dowager. She does the fussing and I rule."

"I see perfectly, quite see," remarked Mr. Trotman. "I always suspected as much." (He had done nothing of the sort.) "But this amalgamation of newspapers in the last ten years or so . . . Is that also due to the parties becoming obsolete, as you say? I never could understand how one man could own a Conservative newspaper in one place and a Liberal paper in another. It doesn't seem right, if I may say so. Convictions are convictions. . . ."

"If one man does serve two parties," said the Director with a smile of doubtful meaning, "I admit there may be an element of dishonesty. But suppose two parties serve one man. . . . That alters the case. There is no dishonesty in being served by two parties, or forty parties. It is the parties themselves that are dishonest with their absurd humanitarian pretensions and their electioneering claptrap. And as for the amalgamation of the Press, the so-called intellectual trust—as if newspapers were intended to be intellectual. . . . Unity is strength: it's money."

"Yes, it is," observed the Famous Grocer. "I have found it so myself. When I started business, I . . ."

"And now we may practically say that there are only three newspapers in the kingdom: the *Times*—Old Tuppenny, as they call it since I bought the controlling interest in it and reduced its price to twopence—the *Penny Press*, and the *Halfpenny Press*. Other newspapers do survive, but they have only a technical or faddistic circulation, like *Science*, *The Motor*, *Excelsior*,

vegetarian pamphlets, religious journals and sweetness-and-light magazines. There's the Labour Press, of course, but that cannot afford an efficient news service and it wastes its wits in making ignorant men guffaw.

"The *Times* is unchanged, except that it gives the minimum of news and all the advertisements it can get at prices it is afraid to reduce. For, as it told the world in 1912, it feels that its old-established energies are best directed towards the dissemination of really useful literature—cookery books, illustrated bibles, and publishers' remainders furbished up; encyclopædias, dictionaries, home-dressmakers, and so forth. It is the organ of the deferred payment system, unrivalled even by the *Halfpenny Press*, at selling unnecessary commodities to people who can't afford them. It still remains the national journal—and rightly so—but you will notice that the foreign journals now quote the *Halfpenny Press*. Poor old *Times*! We've run it very hard."

"I have the *Encyclopædia Anglicana*," said Mr. Trotman proudly.

"Have you! It's nice to know what our grandfathers thought. The *Penny Press*, as I was saying, has a circulation, and a large one, among maiden ladies, clergymen, small shareholders and people who think they think. They revel in its platitudes and timorous respectability. One page of tall talk to two pages of advertisements is its recipe for amusing the British public, and to do it justice the public does turn to the advertisement pages first. It is the organ of the small investor, but it has now too little influence even to make a successful scare. I shall kill it altogether soon with my projected *Imperial Advertiser*—advertisements, and births, deaths and marriages, every single one of them in the kingdom; several correspondence pages and two serials with a strong love interest and no naked sexuality to offend the middle-class. That is the

sort of newspaper for fighting the *Penny Press* on its own ground. That's the paper the man in the street will take home to the woman in the suburbs. The freely opened correspondence pages will draw to it ninety per cent of those who think they think."

"A great many people," said Mr. Trotman with resentment at Sir Pushcott's cocksureness, "run down the *Halfpenny Press* too."

"Of course they do. It is successful. It knows what it wants and gets there. It has more energy put into it than all the other newspapers taken together, and energy still counts in large affairs if prudence has taken its place in small. They talk about education everlasting, as if it were a cure-all instead of a process for making unfit nations unfitter : the *Halfpenny Press* has done more to educate the masses than all the education bills that were ever elaborated to death. It has given them innumerable items of knowledge as useless as the contents of school books, and profitable to nobody except the shareholders of the *Halfpenny Press*. But, mind you, it *has* made the masses conscious of the world at large as well as of their own parish, of other nations as well as their own families. Granted that the world revealed to them by the *Halfpenny Press* is part imaginary : what world, what revelation, is not ? I don't say it has been done the best way possible. It could only be done on a satisfactory financial basis ; and the *Halfpenny Press* has done it efficiently and quickly, largely no doubt because it is a halfpenny ; for ha'pence can often do what pounds cannot. And perhaps in becoming world-conscious, the masses have lost consciousness of the universe and of their own souls, if they've got any. . . . Who can tell ? That is not my business."

The magnitude of the baronet's arguments was putting Mrs. Trotman into a respectful confusion of mind.

"Then," she asked, "is your *Halfpenny Press*, Sir Pushcott, going to be the only paper?"

"I trust so, madam, eventually. One imperial nation, one God, one Church, one King, one newspaper, and one Director of the lot! That is the watchword for our great and glorious race. It was I who prevented a disastrous war with Germany, though I should have been three-quarters of a million in pocket had we won, and perhaps if we had lost. But the issue of the war was too uncertain. It was I who brought about the triumphant war with the East African negroes. It was I who suppressed, till after peace, the disasters of the war against Turkey. It was I who created, who consecrated I might almost say, the Archbishop of All the Empire. It was I . . ."

Sir Pushcott Bingley dropped off to sleep. And the Trotmans sat obsequiously around him.

The Managing Director of the Empire was asleep!

"Poor man," said Mrs. Trotman, "he's so tired that he's fallen asleep." She spoke in such a way that it would be all the better if he were not too far gone to hear her. "He's a very nice gentleman, isn't he, James?"

"Yes," replied her worshipful husband. "Not a bit proud."

"Don't you think we'd better wake him? He told that man he wanted him at the Blue Boar at ten o'clock, and it's ten-to now."

"Perhaps we had.—Sir!"

Mr. Trotman called the sleeper gently.

"Sir Pushcott!"

There was no response.

"Sir Pushcott Bingley! Sir!"

The Mayor touched him as respectfully as if he were a piece of damp toffee, or someone else's pocket handkerchief.

"Sir Push-cott!"

"Oh, yes, . . . I've been thinking. . . . Was I asleep? No, surely? Room a little warm. Headache. What time is it? I must be going. Very many thanks for your hospitality, and help. Where is that young man, your son? Alexander? Yes. I should like to see him a moment. Don't trouble to come out. No, thank you. Your son will show me the way to my hotel, I've no doubt."

"I will do so myself."

"No. Pray don't trouble. Indeed! Good night. Good night, Mrs. Trotman, and very many thanks. I will give myself the pleasure of calling to-morrow morning, when I have settled one or two matters. Now then, Mr. Alexander, if you please."

Thus neatly was the Mayor of Trowbury left behind. But all that Sir Pushcott Bingley said to Alec was:

"Well, and what do you think about it?"

"Don't know," Alec appeared to reply.

"That's right," said Sir Pushcott with much tactful encouragement in his voice. "Now I want you to-morrow to write an article for the *Halfpenny Press*: 'How I Moved the Hill,' or something like that. Tell the whole truth, you know. And make it crisp. Fulton will polish it up for you. Good night, my boy. You don't seem to know that you are a celebrity. . . ."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Never mind. Good night. Take care of that digestion of yours. Come to the hotel and inquire for me to-morrow morning at a quarter to nine. You can? Good night."

Sir Pushcott Bingley had ten minutes' talk with the *Halfpenny Pressman*. Then the six-cylinder motor-car sped up to London, where Fulton dictated much important news to a linotype operator.

James Trotman questioned his son magisterially as

to what the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* had said to him, and because Alec could give no coherent account of nothing in particular he was called a liar. His father, however, offered himself to help him with the article.

## XVII

Sir Pushcott Bingley went to bed with a more than half-formed plan in his mind for using Alec Trotman and Ramshorn Hill to his own purpose and profit. A capitalist, both in brains and money, he was now preparing to create an investment. The matter required care and swift action. He slept badly and awakened with a most metallic taste in his mouth. He solemnly warned himself against the Famous Grocer's whiskey.

Several other people in Trowbury slept indifferently well that night—Mrs. Trotman, Alec, poor Julia worst of all. The disappearance of Ramshorn Hill had never touched her so nearly as the hysterical chatter of Miss Starkey.

She was, as I have said, a good woman; of a sentimental unreasoning goodness perhaps; but fundamentally good in intention for all that. Life behind drapers' shops, with its silliness, its pathos, and sometimes its rank beastliness, had sharpened her native sensibilities. That she was inclined to suspiciousness and jealousy is excusable, seeing that those are traits less of the individual than of the race. In regard to joy, she was not a miser with a hoard, but a very poor person, compelled to be thrifty. Her appreciation of what she supposed to be good was strong, however limited in breadth; and it was founded on all sorts of curious things, such as sermons, proverbs, paternal

sayings, cheap novels and the influence of a school teacher whom she had dearly loved in her happier younger days. Her dislike of evil, on the other hand, and her great interest in it, was wide in scope and was founded on experience rather than on opinion and theory. Women in her position see many more problem plays than the keenest of theatre-goers.

The result of this outlook, combined with an almost sleepless night, was quite characteristic. She decided that she neither could nor would ever marry Alec Trotman. She imagined herself saying fine pathetic things to the traitorous Miss Starkey, and giving up Alec with a lofty contempt for his weakness together with absolute forgiveness of his sin. Separating the sin and the sinner is a task peculiarly congenial to such women. At the bottom of her mind, below anything she was able to put into definite thought, Julia hated Miss Starkey and loved Alec. Consciously, she did precisely the opposite ; she nursed a dislike for Alec and pitied Miss Starkey ; and took up for herself the position of Julia, Saint and Martyr. A good laughing talk with a worldly acquaintance and due consideration of the polygamous instincts of menfolk in general, and of lady-killing youth in particular, would have done her much service. But such a view was beyond the powers of her unaided self, and therefore she wept silently in her bed and twisted and turned about whilst the other young ladies slept and sighed and snored and snuffled around her.

It is sufficiently wonderful that the fight between her goodness and her vital instincts ended in a truce. To discredit Miss Starkey's ravings had not entered her mind.

Over breakfast she fainted. That worried and wronged lady, Mrs. Clinch, with whom she was a favourite because she was not constantly giving notice to leave,

prescribed a day's holiday. Mr. Clinch pooh-pooh'd the idea. Fainting was nothing in young girls, he said ; they were always at it ; they did it on purpose. Mere laziness ! But when Mrs. Clinch pointed out that she had no time for nursing and that another young lady was leaving within three days, after which additional work would fall on Miss Jepp, then with a *damn* to save his dignity he reluctantly consented.

Julia set out for Miss Starkey's.

A cordial "How are you, dear?" and a gentle kiss were present in her mind. She intended to play the saint in a perfectly thoroughgoing manner. This course, however, was nipped in the bud by Miss Starkey's appearance and manner. She was no longer hysterical and clinging : she was cool, collected and desperate ; apparently herself again. She at any rate had slept.

"However did you get here at this time of day?" she asked ; and then, without waiting for a reply, she continued : "After you went last night, Mrs. Smith came up and gave me a week's notice, saying that *her* house has always been *most* respectable. *You* didn't tell her anything, did you?"

"I only told her not to disturb you because you weren't well."

"Then she must have been listening again. I shall go before the week's up."

"But where are you going to, my dear?" asked Julia with some concern.

"That's what I don't know. And I don't care ! I can't go home because of Mother. There's a clergyman's wife gives her something sometimes and *she'd* stop dead if she knew about me. Besides, my stepfather would turn me out. He's always holy and righteous when he's not sober. I don't know where I'm going. And I don't care ! Under a hedge. . . ."

"But we must do something."

"Anyhow, we can't talk about it here. That old woman will be eavesdropping again. Let's go out."

Julia could have wept—not wholly from a feeling of helplessness. It occurred to her to take a situation in another town, to run away from the whole affair; but a desire to stay by Alec, although she was quite, quite sure she would have nothing further to do with him, and a notion that she ought to be good to Miss Starkey just because it was all Alec's fault, decided her to remain in Trowbury. In her heart of hearts, of course, she felt that Alec was more sinned against than sinning, and possibly a wish to save him from Miss Starkey had also something to do with her decision. At all events, she was worried and baited by fate to the point of feeling tragical and very nearly of fainting again.

Just as Trowbury is the market town for mile upon mile of downland, so the Downs are the place where Trowbury takes its—not recreation, for that to the semi-educated mind of the townsfolk implies some gaiety like dances, plays, fêtes or tea-fights;—but Trowbury takes its sedate Sunday walks and airs its stuffy-minded population upon the Downs. Of the many pretty paths around, only those which lead to the hills are really foot-worn. It is the unconscious tribute of the town to something greater and more spacious than itself.

So it was natural that the two girls should insensibly direct their footsteps towards the hill sky-line. Having a momentous subject in waiting for discussion, they were almost silent. They were afraid of what they would have to say when they did talk. Two black figures, they were, on the white winding road—two spots of strife upon the tranquil hills.

When Miss Starkey remarked that they were nearing Ramshorn Hill the truth of it struck Julia almost with a shock.

"This," she said, not wanting to speak more to the

point, "This is where me and Alec Trotman came last Sunday evening."

"Of course 'tis. You know, *I* know, dear."

"Who told you?"

"Young Trotman."

Julia became silent again.

They went and looked into the hollow, standing on the brink like two children, bowed wonderingly over a grave. It was great and horrible even by day. It caused them to feel reverent. It invaded their minds, diminishing their daily life and preoccupations to something of small importance. On a sudden impulse they kissed each other.

"You will be late for dinner," said Miss Starkey with characteristic inconsequence.

"Never mind. I needn't go back at all to-day if I don't like—not till shut-up time, I mean."

Instead of taking a quick path to Trowbury, they descended towards Mrs. Parfitt's cottage.

Not far from it, Julia stopped suddenly in the middle of the trackway. She brightened up. "I think I know," she said. "You wait outside, Edie. I won't be long."

Nurse Parfitt met her with a "La, my dear! how be 'ee?" The old woman had a swarm of questions ready, many of them with stings in their tails. Julia, however, went straight to the point, dragging Mrs. Parfitt willy-nilly after her.

Had Mrs. Parfitt a spare room in her cottage?—Yes, a tiny one she had never properly furnished, where she hung up her little bit of washing on wet days.

Would Mrs. Parfitt take a lodger?—Well, she'd never thought much about it.

Yes, but would she?—She didn't know, but she *was* a bit lonesome, especially on dark winter nights. She thought she would, if she could get one so far from the town.

Julia knew of a lodger. Julia would make sure the payment was all right.

Was the lodger Julia herself then ?

No, but it was a very dear unfortunate friend who had nowhere else at all to go to.

But Mrs. Parfitt had been thinking that a young man lodger would be nicer—out all day and more protection by night, like.

Julia rose to the situation. She had never known herself so skilful in acrobatic argument. By whatever way Mrs. Parfitt tried to escape from her half-given promise, there she found Julia stationed with a plea directed at her charity, at the increasing wrongness of things since the old woman was young, at her womanliness, at her loneliness, at her pride in the Trotman family. For in the heat of words, Julia had mentioned her suspicion of Alec and Miss Starkey. She gave the old woman to understand that it was Alec's fault. (Mrs. Parfitt would have been proud beyond measure had it not been so irregular. As it was, she could not conceal her pleasure in the notion that Alec had got a child.) It must never be mentioned, urged Julia, or it would ruin Alec ; and if Miss Starkey stayed on in the town, he would probably be ruined that way too. Only Nurse Parfitt—no one else—could save the honour of the Trotmans, and at the same time befriend the poor girl (*alias* the said hussy) who was at that very moment waiting outside the cottage because she didn't know how good and kind Nurse Parfitt would be.

“ There, my dear, you've been and quite got over poor old me. Go an' fetch her in, to be sure. You be a good girl, that you be, to offer to pay and all. I'll be bound I'd never ha' done like you if I'd a-been the young man's young 'oman. There's things us females can't put up wi', religion or no religion, I say ; an' I hope you won't never be sorry, my dear.”

Julia kissed the stubby old face. She did not say, however, that she had decided not to embark on married life with Alec at the oars.

She fetched in Miss Starkey. Mrs. Parfitt looked her up and down like a suspicious bird, and wished her a very good day. But when Miss Starkey heard what had been arranged, and wept, this time healthily, then the old woman's motherliness bobbed uppermost. She kissed the girl and fondled her with hard wrinkled hands, and took off her outdoor things, and tried to console her with freely expressed opinions on the nature and ways of menfolk. Moral faddiness does not usually obtain any great hold in cottage life.

Mrs. Parfitt had not much food in the house, but what there was the three of them ate with better appetites than they had had for some time. They sat together far into the afternoon hatching protective lies that nobody but a fool could possibly believe.

## XVIII

The copy of the *Evening Press* bought by Julia and Miss Starkey on their way back from Mrs. Parfitt's, reminds one of nothing so much as of a brass band tournament. Its separate instruments were not at all bad, for the Halfpenny Pressman was a clever enough journalist even though he did squat by the roadside and sentimentalise over life and death. But the total effect—the total effect was in the highest degree astounding. And like the noise of brass band tournaments, it occupied that evening to the exclusion of all else the brains, or rather the mental ears, of everybody within earshot, of a couple of millions of English newspaper readers; and, moreover, after the music had

ceased, it left in the mind a horribly sticky residue, a persistent after-echo of blaring sound.

Ramshorn Hill was now first called, in huge capitals, THE HOLY MOUNTAIN—a name very cleverly pirated from one of the obscure and despised religious journals. Other headlines were :—

TROWBURY'S WONDER-WORKER

THE MAYOR'S SON

A MIRACLE

THE ACTON TRAGEDY

THE CONNECTION

ADAMANTINE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE

TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION

SCIENTIFIC OPINIONS

A BISHOP ON THE MIRACLE

FULL DETAILS

EYE-WITNESSES' ACCOUNTS

Sir Pushcott Bingley and the Halfpenny Pressman had indeed done their work most excellently well. Julia did not think very highly of a photograph of Alec Trotman, but she was extremely proud of an interview with him in which Alec, at ordinary times so wordless, was made to speak like a voluble yet modest commercial traveller.

One scientist questioned whether some undiscovered action of the law of gravity had not been at work, whilst another opined that an unknown property of radium, accidentally stumbled upon by Mr. Alexander Trotman, had been the cause of the apparent miracle. A Fellow of the Royal Society reserved his opinion for the next meeting of that society. Theoretic science, in

fact, was as helplessly conjectural as it usually is when confronted with something of greater magnitude than a laboratory experiment.

Religion, on the other hand, maintained its accustomed certainty and disagreement. A minister of the Free Churches confidently expected the end of the world, basing his declaration on certain verses of the *Book of Revelation* and the composition of the Cabinet. Another asserted that the Higher Criticism was now finally bankrupt, because if the modern miracle was true, why should not also the miracles of Holy Writ be true? Yet another thanked God for all His mercies—which was all he desired to say until he knew more about it. The most practical suggestion religion had to offer was that a world-mission or revival should be held on the top of the Holy Mountain, in the eye of the modern Babylon. By such means the message of God through His churches was to resume its sway in the hearts of men, and doubtless the Lord would bless our England for initiating an international soul-revival, if indeed he had not in his lovingkindness expressly designed that our England should be so privileged. Commercial prosperity and the solution of the unemployment problem would follow.

It was suggested that the stability of the Holy Mountain should be efficiently tested, and, if found good, that the National Observatory should be removed thither from Greenwich, or that an entirely new observatory should be built there and equipped by some Yankee millionaire with money to spare for the Old Country. To this the editor of the *Evening Press* appended a note saying that a progressive industrial city in the north had recently erected two costly observatories on the tops of new public buildings, and had found the instruments quite useless on account of the dirtiness of the city's atmosphere. Many other sug-

gestions were aired in the correspondence columns, including one, that a stream flowing down the hill might supply hydraulic and electric power to the whole of London. How the stream was to be got to the top of the Holy Mountain the correspondent—a distinguished author with a book about to appear—did not explain.

Julia and Miss Starkey read through the paper very carefully. They even examined the cricket news for possible references to Alec Trotman. They were so astonished by it all that they sank their own troubles and spent the remainder of the evening, until it was time for Julia to return to the Emporium, in talking over and over again Alexander Trotman and his miracle ; in playing at bat and ball with the tittle-tattle of his life and the details of his ways.

But Julia Jepp was noticeably reticent with regard to what had really happened when she and Alec were on the Downs.

## XIX

On Wednesday morning Alderman Trotman went out before breakfast and himself purchased a copy of the *Halfpenny Press*. The merest peep at its news-page showed him that the Mayor of Trowbury's son was the topic of the day. He returned to the shop, asked if the *Halfpenny Press* was not having a good sale, and bought two more copies. Another early-bird at the news-agent's saluted him so respectfully that he walked the length of Castle Street with the two copies under his arm and the third half-open in his hands. With what dignity he walked ! He forgot to bully his household for breakfast, and even let his wife help the rashers as well as pour out the Famous Blend of tea.

A shaft of morning sunshine, filtering in through the

grubby window-pane, lit up the peaceful motes that danced in the air. Mrs. Trotman had dusted the room betimes. Other signs were not wanting that something extraordinary was agog. She had donned her mayoral costume—the one she wore for opening bazaars and giving away prizes—and had waved her hair with the curling-tongs. She had laid out upstairs her husband's church-parade tail-coat—two clean linen shirts in one week!—and she had brought down his top-hat, that was usually reserved for Sundays and funerals, and had hung it in the passage.

For Sir Pushcott Bingley, Bart.—the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*—was expected at the Famous Grocery Establishment, on business.

“What time did Sir Pushcott say he was coming?” the Alderman asked in a mellower voice of command than he was accustomed to use over breakfast.

“Indeed, I don’t know, dear,” answered his wife. “You must wait,” she added with an elegant tranquillity.

“H’m! Listen to this. . . . And this. . . .”

Mr. Trotman had never before troubled to read aloud from his morning paper, unless it were an occasional Stock Exchange quotation when an astute investment of his was going up in price. Now, however, he read on and on whilst his goodwife purred to hear him. It was perhaps as well that he did not grasp the full purport of what he was reading.

Sir Pushcott Bingley’s plan for rewarding first Sir Pushcott Bingley and then the mover of the Holy Mountain was very subtly foreshadowed in the leader for the day. The man who could move mountains, it said, was an invaluable asset to any imperial nation. Compared with him, the government dealt in molehills. Such an eminence, overhanging the metropolis of the Empire, would be of incalculable benefit in the cause

of invasion by a foreign power. The man who could move mountains might well prove the saviour of the nation, and his services should at any cost be strictly reserved for the British Empire. No penny wise, pound foolish, policy! No driving him into the hospitality of alien arms. The chain of evidence which proved the Mayor of Trowbury's son, Mr. Alexander Trotman, to be the mover of the Holy Mountain was unbreakable. Skilled research by Special Commissioners of the *Halfpenny Press* was still in progress. The young man himself, with characteristic modesty, seemed as yet hardly aware of the miracle he had wrought. Which was not to be wondered at. But he was in complete accord with "A Country Pastor" (see Correspondence) and desired nothing so much as that religion, which had inspired his work, should be the first to reap the benefit. Christianity was the foundation of British greatness and prosperity. Religion before warfare! The Prince of Peace before the warrior! "Let us sweep aside," continued the leader, "all petty questions as to the proprietorship of Ramshorn Hill and of the ground at Acton on which it stood. A thing is sanctified by its use. How can a grateful nation reward such a man? How can a nation in its gratitude make the best use of his wondrous work?"

In another column, Mr. Trotman read that the *Halfpenny Press*, ever to the forefront in voicing popular sentiment and ideals, was now, as always, prepared to lead at whatever expense. It would increase its size temporarily and would open its correspondence columns to the hundreds of men and women who were prepared to help the nation in its task. Moreover, an article by Mr. Alexander Trotman himself would appear in the next day's issue, and it was possible, indeed, that he would even deliver an address at a public meeting to be convened for that purpose in London.

Mr. Trotman read to the end, then looked up. "They're smart, aren't they?" he observed judicially. "That's what I call very smart—*very!* I say, Lilian; send the girl for the *Penny Press* and the *Times*. I should like to see what they say.—Where's Alec?"

"I've taken him up a cup of cream cocoa. It will do him good after last night. The child's run down."

"Better see he runs down from his bedroom pretty soon. I want him. Cream cocoa! I wish *I* could drink cream cocoa. Liver, liver! And he's got that article to do before Sir Pushcott comes, and I expect he'll want my help. He never was a good hand at writing."

"Oh, I'm sure he is! He got a prize for writing at school."

"He's never been any good since, anyhow. I *could* write when I was his age. D'you remember my letters to you? Have you got 'em treasured up with your marriage lines? Eh?"

Mrs. Trotman blushed.

"Here," said her husband. "Let's see."

He was referring not to those love letters which had brought to his wife's face one of her rare blushes, but to the newspapers just brought in by the servant. He spread out the ponderous *Times* in front of him. "The damn thing's all advertisements and government twaddle!" he snarled. He folded it up and passed it to his wife to look at.

Small wonder, indeed, that he was disappointed. The *Times* contained merely a note to the effect that no one had explained satisfactorily the upheaval in Acton, and another note to the effect that no one had explained satisfactorily the disappearance of Rams-horn Hill in Wiltshire; which was, the *Times* observed, very remarkable. Apart from these two highly restrained paragraphs, there was nothing at all about the momentous subject, except a full page advertise-

ment which stated with obese circumvention, among a mass of statistics and testimonials, that the *Times*, having ever before it the duty of educating, instructing and amusing the public, had decided to offer on the instalment system a limited number of copies (apply early !) of the latest edition of the magnificent translation of the monumental scientific work of the eminent Herr Professor Dr. von Bocktrinker, on *Earthquakes and Earth-Disturbances*, in six volumes—a mass of popular erudition which no enlightened man could afford to be without. One shilling with the Order Form appended, and sixpence a month (one-fifth of a penny *per diem*) would secure this priceless possession to the purchaser and his heirs for ever. It would pay for itself in thirteen days.

The *Penny Press*, on the other hand, was exceedingly interested in what it supposed to be ‘a widespread seismic disturbance having its twin centres beneath Acton and Wiltshire.’ Alderman Trotman appreciated to the utmost a long dignified letter, from the head of an Oxford college, replete with profound commonplaces about the unprecedented in life and in fiction, the intentions of a Beneficent Deity, and the possible effect on industry and scholarship. There was also (but this only roused the Mayor’s contempt) an article by a professional pathos-monger describing the unhappy fate of the unfortunate families of Acton :

O’erwhelmed beneath a million tons of earth !

An article illustrating by means of elaborate diagrams the geological formation of Acton and of the chalk Downs was followed by an announcement that the publication of a scientific investigation, instituted by and at the expense of the *Penny Press*, was pending.

“ Pooh ! ” said Mr. Trotman. “ These other rags ain’t got a spice of go. Sir Pushcott Bingley’s the man.—Just go’n tell Alec to hurry up down.”

## XX

The Mountain Mover—Chop-Allie Trotman—came downstairs about nine o'clock.

"Well, my boy," said his father. "How are you this morning? Fit?"

So surprised was Alec at his father's politeness, a thing unexperienced by him since he won a prize at school for good (*i.e.* colourless) conduct, that he could only mumble, "I don' know," and make an effort to escape the paternal presence.

"Now, my boy, you know you've got that article to write for Sir Pushcott Bingley. Better start at once, hadn't you? No time like the present, that's the motto of a successful man. Ask Sir Pushcott if it isn't. Get a pen and ink and some paper, and sit down to it. Let's see what you can do. I never spared expense over your schooling, as I've often told you and your mother. D'you think you can make something of it—*How I moved the Hill—How I worked a Miracle*—or something of that sort?"

The paternal affability was too much. Alec looked up furtively at his smiling father. He mumbled again, "I don' know," and slouched round the room for writing materials. It was not a voluble, scarcely a promising, beginning. It is to be feared, indeed, that the Mountain-Moving Wonder-Worker, although the son of a Famous Grocer, was not in all things the equal even of the Halfpenny Pressman.

"Get at it, my boy," his father repeated, "or else Sir Pushcott will be here before you've begun. I'm just going down to the Blue Boar to inquire for Sir Pushcott and see when he is coming. Get at it. Be business-like. Sit down. See if you can get it done by the time I come back,"

Alec did try to be business-like ; or rather, he tried to begin doing what the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* demanded. For he too, in spite of his apathy in regard to everything unconnected with Miss Julia Jepp, was slightly carried off his feet by Sir Pushcott's wealth, energy, motors and greatness. No sooner did the Mayor perceive that his son had really 'got at it,' than he bustled away, beaming with gratified excitement, to the Blue Boar bar, where he certainly inquired after Sir Pushcott Bingley and as certainly partook with pleasure of a sleeve of brandy and soda.

As for Alec : like many a better man before him, he remained seated, ready and waiting for inspiration, in front of a fair white sheet of paper—white except for the imprint of the Famous Grocery Establishment. There is, as we know, a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to victory. But what man can say that those who content themselves with floating on that tide are not wiser than those who try to swim in it ; kicking themselves out to sea instead of allowing themselves to be cast up on the golden strand. That must be the secret of masterly inactivity, which often enough is nothing but incapacity in the retroprospect. To-day you cannot do something ; to-morrow you will have the sense not to have done it. Alec practised such masterly inactivity. He did nothing ; that is, he left time and tide to do everything.

But along came Mrs. Trotman—a kicker-out in the waves of fate if ever there was one.

"Alec, my dear, you must begin. Your father will be so angry and say it's my fault. Now—there's a dear. . . ."

"All right. I'm going to. I'm thinking what to put."

'Twas not true. He was thinking what not to put—

what he couldn't put—Julia Jepp—a well-remembered kiss. He plucked up desperation and began floundering :

#### HOW THE HILL MOVED.

I went up over the Downs last Sunday evening with a friend and when we got up there I wished Ramshorn Hill was in London near Acton as I am going to near Acton and I wanted to go walking on it because I like the Downs. And when I looked the hill was gone which I have heard it is gone to near Acton but I do not know.

Poor Alec ! his mountainous ideas were like cats' meat—calves' lights—pulmonary tissue, if the expression is more acceptable—and shrank to a rag in the boiling. One page of commercial note-paper filled, and three words on the next ! But he kept at it ; he drew whirligigs on the blotting-paper and inked his fingers pulling the pen to pieces. He could have wept from sheer helplessness, and might have done so had he not read his little article again and thought it by no means so bad after all.

In that state of mind, common among literary men, did his father find Alec.

"Now then, me boy !" said the Mayor as if he were carving a sirloin chosen by himself at the butcher's.

Alec let him take the sheet of note-paper, and Mr. Trotman perused the article. He re-perused it. "But Alec," he said, "this won't do at all. You're not writing a letter to your mother. You want to be smart for the *Halfpenny Press*—stuff it with facts and be picturesque. Make it like an advertisement. D'you see ? And what's this about a friend. I haven't heard anything about a friend ! Who was it ? Eh ? "

Alec hung his head and was silent.

"Oh, well, never mind ! I will help you. Get a clean sheet of paper and I'll dictate while you take it down. Sir Pushecott dictates all his important articles, I expect. Now then ! Head it. . . . H'm !"

'Mendment Trotman lighted one of his seven remaining sixpenny cigars and looked as if infinite wisdom was being conceived within him.

"Ah ! I have it. That's better. Much ! Head it, *How I Moved the Holy Mountain*. That's what they call it. A taking title that. Always approach your subject gently. Worm your way in, my boy. It reads better. Put . . . Are you ready ? Put :

"Though I received from my father, the present Mayor of Trowbury, the best education that could be got—procured, I was—I was—absolutely'—yes—'absolutely unaware of my power to move mountains, and I am completely unable to decide whether my power'—ah!—'to do so, is'—ah!—'inherited or acquired.' Got that ? 'On Sunday last, the seventeenth instant, together with a friend, it being a beautiful evening, I repaired to the Downs near the progressive market-town of Trowbury. . . .' Who did you say was with you ? Eh ?—What's that ? "

It was Mrs. Trotman at the door.

"Sir Pushecott Bingley's coming. Make haste."

"All right. Be quiet. I'm dictating. Show him up to the drawing-room. I'll be there in a minute.—Now Alec, d'you think you can go on like that ? Put some go and smartness into it. Tell them everything. Everybody's ready to tell everybody everything nowadays. *That's* a good sentence. . . . Let 'em see your fighting weight on paper."

Mr. Trotman strutted away with the gait of a man of importance. How unusually jolly he was ! He felt quite national—veritably *in medias res*.

Alec was left to himself, seated before the hatching

article. But he was no hen, nor yet an incubator ; he was only the Mountain Mover. In about ten minutes, he got up and went out.

## XXI

Mr. Trotman found Sir Pushcott Bingley in the drawing-room, not seated and rather pale in face.

"I should," he said, "have been earlier, but business . . ."

"Oh, don't mention it, Sir Pushcott !" exclaimed Mrs. Trotman with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Not at all, my dear sir," added Mr. Trotman blandly.

"I should like to have a chat with you about this extraordinary affair of your son's."

"You think . . ."

"It might perhaps be made very advantageous to him."

"You think, Sir Pushcott . . ."

"And, indeed, to all of you."

"Really, Sir Pushcott . . ."

"Or, on the other hand, it might involve you in extremely awkward legal consequences—interference with landed interests and so forth, you understand."

"He might be summonsed for moving the hill ?" asked Alec's mother.

"Exactly. Somebody else's hill—Crown land—and the owners of the present site of the hill in Acton—a mass of litigation. . . ."

"Oh, what *can* we do, Sir Pushcott ?" exclaimed Mrs. Trotman in accents of ladylike despair. "It's like stealing !"

"Precisely, Mrs. Trotman ; or worse."

"Oh! Sir Pushcott!"

"In any case your son can do nothing, defensive or aggressive, without capital—a large sum of money."

Mr. Trotman had been listening intently with his most intelligent expression on his face. "All my little capital is invested in the development of my business," he hastened to say.

"But for Alec!" Mrs. Trotman began.

"Impossible, Lilian. Quite! Sir Pushcott Bingley—a business man—will understand. . . ."

"Yes, certainly."

"I," continued the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*, "I happen to have both capital and influence. Possibly I can help him to do something. . . ."

"Oh, Sir Pushcott!"

The Trotmans, had they been as wise as they thought themselves, would have taken warning from the extreme impassiveness of the Director's face. His eyes, even, hardly moved. They simply looked. "Something very advantageous," he said, "possibly. Perhaps it would be better to see the young man himself. Alec, is it not?"

"Alexander, after the hero. 'Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules. . . .'"

"Ah, yes; of course."

Forthwith there was a hue and cry after the hero throughout the Famous Grocery Establishment. The uncompleted articles lay on the table in the dining-room, but Alec, he was nowhere to be found. The Mayor and Mayoress were full of apologies. Alec was unsettled, they said; and Mr. Trotman showed signs of preparing to air his intellects before the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* while Mrs. Trotman was looking for her boy. Sir Pushcott, however, with that practical sense which ever distinguished him, insisted that the whole of the household should join in the search;

by which means Mr. Trotman was got rid of. "Time, no doubt, is precious to you, Sir Pushcott," remarked Mr. Trotman as he left the drawing-room.

Alexander Trotman was found in the Station Road. There is no record of what his father said as to the idiocy of neglecting great men and great opportunities. Suffice it to say that the Mayor acted a whole town council towards his son, whom at length, in no very supple frame of mind, he led into the presence in the drawing-room.

"Now Mr. Alexander," said the Director of the *Half-penny Press*, "I have been talking to your father and mother, and we think that you and I may be able to arrive at an agreement—a sort of partnership—which may turn out greatly to your advantage."

Mrs. Trotman gave vent to a series of exclamatory expressions from which stood out the words: "Partnership—Sir Pushcott Bingley—Alec dear!" Mr. Trotman looked more business-like than ever; as if he had an amendment or two in his pocket. But Alec, he looked guilty and rather sullen.

"The revivalists at the Crystal Palace are anxious to hear you next Sunday evening; in fact, some monetary result is assured you, even if my plan for your advantage miscarries. I should be glad to take you to London with me; this afternoon, if you can be ready; as soon as my car returns from Town."

"Oh, Alec!" Mrs. Trotman exclaimed again. "Go to London with Sir Pushcott! In his motor-car!—Of course he can be ready, Sir Pushcott. I can send some more clean things on after him."

"But first of all we may as well sign our agreement of partnership."

Sir Pushcott Bingley produced a long envelope.

"I don't like agreements," said 'Mendment Trotman. "They only make work for lawyers."

"Read it, sir. I fancy there is nothing in it you can find fault with."

The document purported to be a memorandum of agreement between Alexander Trotman, Esquire, of Castle Street, Trowbury, on the one part, and Sir Pushcott Henry Bingley, Baronet, of 104, Park Lane, London, W., Newspaper Proprietor, on the other part.

In effect, it stated that in all matters relating to the ownership and development of the Hill, lately arisen in or appeared at or removed to Acton, near London, the said Alexander Trotman and the said Sir Pushcott Henry Bingley were to be partners with equal rights in all profits, proceeds and benefits arising therefrom, the said Alexander Trotman in consideration of his having removed the said Hill, heretofore called Ramshorn Hill, from Wiltshire to Acton, and the said Sir Pushcott Bingley in consideration of his supplying the capital for the due development of the said Hill under the joint ownership or tenancy of the said Alexander Trotman and the said Sir Pushcott Bingley.

Nothing was said about possible damages or responsibilities; nothing as to how the ownership or tenancy of the hill was to be acquired. The document was, in fact, totally invalid, almost farcical; one of those deeds which only stand until lawyers have been paid to prove that they don't stand. With the horses of capital, a coach and four might have been driven through it; but, as Sir Pushcott Bingley well knew, that capital was precisely what the Mountain Mover and his relatives lacked.

Alderman Trotman adjusted his eye-glasses, held the document at arm's length as if it were a grocery sample, read it through twice to himself and once aloud. When that ceremony was ended, his wife said in tones of rapture: "How lovely!—But I don't understand it a bit."

"Be quiet, Lilian," said the Mayor shortly.

Then turning to the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*: "This, sir, is a very serious matter."

"How? Why? It's plain and brief."

"I never believe in signing important documents without due deliberation. I do not pretend to expert legal knowledge, but I have been the means of saving the Council from . . ."

"Pig-headed provincial" was the phrase that flashed through Sir Pushcott Bingley's mind. He stood up and spoke. "Listen to me, please. You can do nothing, not even defend yourselves, without capital and influence. You have neither."

"Considerable influence here," the Mayor was heard to say.

"Which you will carry with you no further than the railway station, believe me. I, on the other hand, have both influence and capital to apply to this business. Your son's action is, as I have said, fraught with the gravest legal consequences, only to be avoided by capital and influence. In a matter like this, they are eleven-tenths of the law. You stand to gain much or to lose everything; or at least, your son does. You can choose. You can have my help or go without it. Those are my terms."

"Do you wish to threaten me, sir?" asked the Alderman in his best municipal fighting tones.

"Don't talk nonsense," rejoined the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*, with a laugh that disconcerted Mr. Trotman far more than all the talk. "Besides, it is your son who has to decide."

"My son will do what I tell him."

"Is your son of age?"

"Alec came of age last January—the 16th," said Mrs. Trotman.

"Then your son can do as he likes.—Now, Mr. Alexander."

Alec had been a confused spectator of the scene. Business, especially legal business—something more than the sale of half a pound of the Famous Blend—was utterly beyond him, so closely and tenderly had he been fed and nurtured at the Famous Grocery Establishment. Lately, however, he had grown in at least one direction. He was beginning to have a mind of his own ; a mind bolstered up by the image of Miss Julia Jepp ; a young mind, and therefore obstinate rather than forceful in getting its own way. A spice of his father's overreaching business methods suddenly appeared in him. He walked forward with a firm timidity which would have been rather fine in a handsomer young man.

"Shall I," he demanded, "get cash out of it ? "

"Of course," said Sir Pushcott kindly.

"Enough to live on ? "

"Certainly."

"Enough to get married on ? "

"*Alec !*"

"**ALEC !**"

"Enough and a good deal more probably."

"Give it here then, please."

"*Alec !*" commanded Mr. Trotman.

"*Alec !* listen to your father," cried Mrs. Trotman.

"Be quiet," said Alec. "I shall ! "

Whereupon he signed the document.

Sir Pushcott Bingley hastened to add his signature, said he would call for Mr. Alexander and his luggage in the early afternoon, and departed to his rooms at the Blue Boar. When the Mayor attempted to expostulate with his son, Alec sulked ; when the Mayoress followed suit, Alec merely said, "Shut up ! It's done, isn't it ? " and walked out.

The question of the legality of the deed itself not occurring to them, Mr. and Mrs. Trotman were obliged to admit, that it *was* done.

They should have said, "Alec has outgrown us."

## XXII

Men of a certain type, when cornered, have a merciful habit of thinking afterwards that their failures were in reality rather clever successes. They do this to such a degree that frequently they are able to indulge in a slightly contemptuous, even kindly, feeling towards those who have got the better of them. Thus they make the best of their bad jobs; idealise them, in short, which is a very human thing to do. Mr. Trotman did it. When his wife said, "I suppose it *is* all right?" he replied with a snap:

"Of course it is. Sir Pushcott Bingley's a smart man, I can tell you, and smart men like being treated smartly. I can always do business with a business-like person. If it had been Clinch or Ganthorn, we should have wrangled for a week and have had heavy lawyers' bills into the bargain."

Since Alec's clothing was already prepared for a much less promising journey to London, the packing went apace. A little bustling on the part of Mrs. Trotman, a little hustling of the servant, who for some reason not known was so well disposed to Master Alec that she sniffed a tear or two—and the portmanteau was tumbled downstairs into the passage. Mr. and Mrs. Trotman completely forgot about the *Halfpenny Press* article. Alec took care not to remind them.

Mrs. Trotman would have liked to give her son many a warning about the naughty city of London, had not a

rather curious hearsay knowledge of its moral byways, a characteristic virtuousness of tongue, and a strange feeling that her boy was now a man, prevented her from speaking freely. She therefore requested the Alderman to talk to him, indicating, as marital intimacy allows, about what.

Had she heard what her husband did in fact say, she would have been troubled. He told the young man never to miss the main chance, and, since morality means money—had meant it in the case of the Famous Grocery—to look after his morals. He instructed him to hold his own with all men, and in any difficulty to write home for his father's advice. He thought that Alec, if his handwriting improved—"Buy a copybook, my boy!"—might be given a berth on the *Halfpenny Press*, perhaps as private secretary to Sir Pushcott. (For Mr. Trotman's imagination was incapable of following out the possible results of the partnership, and with a tradesman's sagacity he wanted Alec to look after the bird that was supposed to be in his hand rather than the flock of birds that was undoubtedly in the bush.) So pleased was the Alderman at talking without let or hindrance, that he finally exhorted his son to beware of women. There was, he hinted, a weakness for women, a sort of inextinguishable gallantry, in the Trotman family.

"My father always used to say that my mother trapped him against his will, and I'm certain your mother married me five years before I wanted to. We had a hard pull for a long time with the double expenses and yourself, Alec. Your mother hadn't a penny to her name. Now you, Alec,"—the Mayor spoke with ineffable sententiousness—"don't you marry for money; I don't mean that: you go where the money is."

Alec thought his father very smart indeed; clever,

yet more than clever. . . . *Smart* is the word. When afterwards in homesick moments he pictured to himself the Famous Grocery, he saw his father standing monarchically in the dining-room and saying those smart things.

The Trotman family was in a highly disturbed condition when the great motor-car drew up in Castle Street at about a quarter past two. The head of the household was drinking spirits in the dining-room. The mother and son were wandering up and down the stairs with frequent looks at the trunk squat obstinately in the passage. Time after time they had been at the point of beginning one last affectionate conversation ; time after time they sheered off again. Alec had the lump in his throat. His mother wept outright.

Sir Pushcott Bingley was well received. Whiskey and the above-mentioned reaction against stupidity had removed all traces of anger from Mr. Trotman's mind. Alec was quite ready, was going out to the door, when the Alderman suddenly thought of the article, that is to say of his own version of it. Sir Pushcott glanced down it in a professional manner, and remarked that modern education was playing the devil with the youth of the country. He caught sight of the other piece of paper, picked it up, and read that too.

"My son's idea of it," remarked the Mayor jocularly.

"It's direct at any rate," said Sir Pushcott. "It does say something. The other is like a leader in the *Penny Press*—all wind and good intentions. You must get Fulton to help you with the article, young man. He'll write it up for you, and then you can sign it."

The Mayor's face was not pleasant to see. His article ! Alec's better ! Words rose within him like a little fountain, and as harmlessly fell back again. Only his wife knew what was going on in his mind,

and prognosticated what was to come forth from his mouth when Sir Pushcott Bingley's restraining presence should be removed from the Famous Grocery.

A man was called out from the hinder part of the shop to place the portmanteau on a spare seat in the body of the car. Alec bade his parents good-bye absent-mindedly. His defiance of his father seemed to have given him reserve. His mother kissed him secretly and pressed into his hand a little tin of meat lozenges : "For the journey, Alec dear." Mr. Trotman shook his son's hand with stage cordiality, told him to get on well, and said with a glance at Sir Pushcott : "Write to the old folks at home, my boy."

Alec made a pretence of listening.

The Director of the *Halfpenny Press* and the Mountain Mover settled themselves in the car. The chauffeur set the engine in motion. Mrs. Trotman waved her hand, gradually receding into the doorway as people ran out from their shops to the pavement. The car started—slowly, as befitted its long powerful unwieldiness.

Alec touched Sir Pushcott on the arm. "I want to go down the Station Road. Please turn round."

"What for?"

"I want to say good-bye to someone."

"Oh. . . ." A smile. "All right."

The gearing rattled ; the car backed and jerked, then glided down the street.

"Stop there, please," said Alec, pointing to Clinch's brilliant Emporium.

They drew up at the main entrance where someone ever stands to throw open the door. On one side was a window full of the politer articles of ladies' under-clothing, and on the other a collection of marvellous reductions in coats and hats. Alec noticed himself noticing them. He entered the shop and looked down the long aisle between the counters, each with an

assistant behind it and some with customers perched on chairs. One young man was bumping rolls of cloth about. A young lady was snipping up cloth for remnants. And there was Miss Julia Jepp, tall, ample and pale, standing at the end of the shop and rolling some salmon-coloured ribbon upon an oval white spool. Alec began impulsively to walk down the shop. Then he stopped short—a blushing wrapped-up figure in the midst of the summery Emporium. He went up to the tall frock-coated shopwalker, the silky gentleman with pins in his coat-lapel.

“I want to see Ju—Miss Jepp.”

“Very good, Mr. Trotman. This way, if you please, sir.—Miss Jepp ! Forward, please !”

A week ago Alec might possibly have been permitted to deliver a note when Mr. Clinch was known to be not about. Perhaps, even, he would have been directed to take that to the side-entrance.

The shopwalker showed them into a fitting-room. Surrounded by mirrors, stacks of white boxes, and black headless dummies, with one fat leg each to stand upon and wire skirts, the lovers met to part.

“Mr. Trotman, you oughtn’t to come here. . . .”

Chilly indeed !

“Julie, I’m going to have enough money for us to get married on. I am, I tell you, sure, certain.”

Julia sighed. “Mr. Trotman,” she said meaningly and sadly, “I have been and seen Miss Starkey.”

“What’s that to do with it ?”

“I shall never marry you. Never !”

Here is to be perceived again the influence of the surreptitious novelette, read by the stump of a candle after lights-out.

“But Julie ! I thought . . .”

Alec flustered.

“I shall never marry. We can never be anything

else but friends. We *can* be that, even after what has happened. You are young. . . .”

“ But, Julie, I’m going to have plenty of money. Sir Pushcott Bingley says so. What d’you mean ? ”

“ Alec,” said Miss Jepp with a religious solemnity, “ search into your own conscience and you will know why.—Now you must go. Write to me if you like, and I’ll write back. God bless you ! ”

She led the helpless Alec to the door. He walked back, up the shop, shamed now by the inquisitive eyes around.

The shopwalker had afterwards considerable pleasure in holding a bottle of salts under Miss Jepp’s nose. Meanwhile the motor-car, with a dejected young man seated all of a heap in it, swung past the Famous Grocery Establishment and up Castle Street.

Sir Pushcott Bingley spoke pleasantly to Alec ; who made no answer. His eyes were watery, as if the rush of air was inflaming them.

Faster and faster went the motor-car, up the London road, up to the foot of the Downs. Soon it was going full speed ahead. Over the winding white road of the Downs it whizzed, followed and veiled by a cloud of dust. The dry sunshine lit up the slopes of the hills, heightened the larks’ song, and glinted on the broken sides of Ramshorn Hollow, as it was already beginning to be called.

A moment or two, and there was nothing on the road but a hay-wain, a shabby dog-cart, a tramp, a smell of burnt petrol and a haze of dust. The young man whose airy fabric had exploded, the Mountain Mover, the Wonder-Worker, the jilted, had left Wiltshire for London.

BOOK II



## I

IF the average father in one of his semi-pious moods, when he feels a paterfamilias to the marrow of his bones, can only be enticed into talking, it will be found that he knows a deal more about his very average son's misdeeds than the son himself. He will, especially if it is the son that has irritated him into frankness, produce more allegations of wrong-doing than a policeman who is prosecuting for promotion. The cause, which is fairly plain, though it seldom occurs either to the fathers or to the sons, is that every father has been also a son. Hence a mother's homily never stings like a father's ; never hits so many nails crookedly on the head.

Alderman Trotman, for instance, set himself hard at work picturing all the things his sole son, Alexander, would do in London if—and Mr. Trotman could not imagine it otherwise—he was at all the bright young fellow his father, the respected Mayor of Trowbury, had been before him. Mrs. Trotman, on the other hand, indulged on her son's behalf in vague grandiose dreams of spangled wickedness.

The lives of those aforesaid average young men seldom appear in print without, at least, the addition of a fog of romance and reticence. For literature has its hypocrisies no less than the unco guid, and being man-made will never allow man to be quite the animal, thwarted animal, that he not infrequently is. Perhaps it is just as well. The young man's misdeeds lightly come and lightly go : print would make them top-heavy. It is only right that he should find out the

lurking-places of the world, the flesh and the devil, in order that he may know how to avoid them after he has settled down, a respectable married man in a red-brick villa. His instinct is doubtless right. "Enough's as good as a feast," says the well-tried proverb. "You cannot know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough," said the good philosopher. At the same time, the spectacle of old men scenting out the young men's imprudences is not pleasant; it is too much like that of toothless curs nosing about for carrion.

Alderman Trotman had a fine nose for the hunt. He set his memory and imagination to work, and communicated the results, with marital candour, to the wife of his bosom. He told her what young men had been used to do in London in his day, delicately hinting that he himself, though buck enough not to lag behind, had yet pulled up when with unusual wisdom he had seen the worthlessness of it all. Alack, Mother Trotman, how wert thou frightened for thine Alexander!

In the upshot, Mrs. Trotman convinced her husband that he was a very light to lighten the Gentiles. He wrote, with the palpitating mother at his elbow, a long letter to Sir Pushcott Bingley, pointing out that Alexander had been most carefully brought up; that his education had been the best (and most expensive) procurable; and that the boy had had little or no experience of great cities. Would Sir Pushcott keep an eye on him, not allow him out late o' nights, nor let him taste strange liquors, and oblige his Very Obediently, James Trotman? That was written on borough note-paper, headed with the Trowbury arms stamped in black. Mrs. Trotman sent a perfumed little heliotrope note to Alexander Trotman, Esqre., c/o Sir Pushcott Bingley, Bart., begging him never, never to do anything he would not like his mother (in her official capacity) to see him do.

And Alec—Alec was a good boy. He had only the defects of his one quality. It needed not the image of Julia to keep him in the strait and narrow path. He was far too timid among human beings to stray from it. He stuck to Sir Pushcott Bingley, whom he did know, until the enterprising baronet was tired of him, and instructed the Halfpenny Pressman to act as male chaperon. When the fumes of Sir Pushcott's wine began to mount into his head, he thought himself unwell, and drank peppermint and water on top of vintage claret. He was used to his mother's cream cocoa and his father's fruity port.

One sin only can be laid to his charge : the food was good and he over-ate himself.

## II

It is the prerogative of the Press to supply at a cheap rate simple thoughts for empty heads. Not for nothing have generations of people called themselves lost sheep. When the Press goes *Baa!* the vast flock of sheep, the nation, goes *Baa!* after it, and the Press goes *Baa!* again. And so we say that the Press both leads and reflects the opinion of the people.

This the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* was well aware of, for he had, in his own mind at all events, no illusions whatever about his profession. It was his brilliant idea to make Alexander Trotman bleat, and to surround him with such an echoed bleating that the whole empire should utter one united *Baa!* And incidentally contribute to the fat and honourable purse of Sir Pushcott Bingley, Bart.

Alec's article, *How I Moved the Holy Mountain*, duly appeared in Friday's *Halfpenny Press*. Needless to say, it

was neither like his own first attempt nor like his father's. It was a model of succinct journalistic autobiography : modest but not shy ; emphatic but not very boastful ; proud but not vain ; coloured but not smudged ; detailed but not diffuse. It was, in short, one of the very best things that had ever come in haste or at leisure from the Halfpenny Pressman's pen ; and to it was appended a photographic reproduction of the signature of Alexander Trotman.

There was excitement in Trowbury ; a double excitement and a generous admiration. Chop-Allie Trotman, whom they all knew, though they had not usually taken much notice of him, had moved Ramshorn Hill, had really done it, and had also written a column in the *Halfpenny Press*. Different people felt differently as to which was the greater achievement. On thinking it out, no doubt, the moving of Ramshorn Hill ; but the other achievement, the article, was easier to grasp mentally, for it came well within the great *Baa!* tradition. Chop-Allie's own words about himself, mightily headlined and heavily printed, in the great daily paper. . . . Who'd ha' thought it ! Every one objected to some item or other ; every one could have shown him how to put this or that a little better ; but then and thenceforward the young man, the Mountain Mover, became for Trowbury 'our fellow-townsman.' He was honoured in his own country.

About Ramshorn Hill, on the other hand, and the Holy Mountain. . . . Well, Trowburians knew all about that. They had known all about it from the first, being nearest. And after all, the article did not say how the Holy Mountain was really moved. Mr. Alexander Trotman, they learnt, was to say more, was to describe the whole affair fully, on the morrow, Saturday, at the Crystal Palace. Faith, he said, faith had done it. Very curious. . . . Faith is not

a marketable commodity. An advertisement of the CRYSTAL PALACE EMPIRE MISSION REVIVAL MEETINGS was inked over the whole of the front page of the same *Halfpenny Press*. Who was going ? How were they going to go ? Was there an excursion up ?

Mr. Clinch of the Emporium strolled down to the railway station. He saw the station-master as if by accident. "It would pay your company to run cheap trains," he volunteered. Mr. Ganthorn gave a precisely similar piece of advice, as regards motor buses, to the manager of the Trowbury Garage and Motories Co. Ltd. It was more to these gentlemen to go on the cheap than to go at all. They desired their spoke in the wheel.

### III

Mr. Trotman was accustomed to buy all the newspapers now. Reading them gave him spasms of admiration and of contempt. He felt at times quite sub-editorial, ready to teach any ignorant pressman his business. His praise of the *Halfpenny Press* was without bounds ; his disdain of the *Penny Press* and the *Times* was the disdain of a famous grocer. On the Friday morning he read Alec's article twice through, and glanced over the other news. Then he handed the newspaper to his wife.

"Very good ! Excellent, by Jove !" he exclaimed.

"It doesn't seem to me much like Alec," Mrs. Trotman remarked, placing the paper on the table and reading by snatches whilst she poured out her husband's third cup of tea. "It's not Alec's way of saying things."

"Damn sight better ! He's done what I . . ."

"James !"

"Much better. The boy's improving. He's got some-

thing in him. I always thought so. Where's my cap and shop-slippers?"

Mrs. Trotman tilted back her chair and reached out to the bell. "Your master's cap and heavy slippers. Now then! don't stand mooning there! Your master's cap and slippers. Look alive!"

The Mayor slopped up the street to a little shop, the counter of which was entirely occupied by swollen bundles of the *Halfpenny Press*, by a largish pile of the *Penny Press* and by a genteel packet of the *Times*. Hung round the window, with pencils, pens, indiarubbers and cheap note-paper, were copies of some of the other surviving journals—the *Christian Endeavourer*, the *Food Reformer*, *Health and Disease*, the *Police News*, and a late invention of Sir Pushcott Bingley's to make the man in the street and the slut in the alley imagine that they were outdoing Scotland Yard in the detection of crime, namely, *Murder Will Out*.

The woman who kept the shop was unfastening a third bundle of the *Halfpenny Press*. Mr. Trotman asked for two copies, and then peeping into the window, his eye fell on the back cover of the *Christian Endeavourer*.

THE CONEY ISLAND MISSIONERS' MONSTER SERVICE

CRYSTAL PALACE, SATURDAY, JULY 23

AT 8.15 P.M.

MR. ALEXANDER TROTMAN

will explain

HOW HE MOVED

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

COME AND HEAR THE MOUNTAIN MOVER

THE MODERN MIRACLE

*Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out, saith the Lord.*

Reserved Seats (a limited number), One Guinea,  
Five Shillings, and One Shilling.

"I'll have that too," said Mr. Trotman.

"Yes, your worship. That'll be two ha'pennies and fourpence: fivepence, please. The *Christian Deavourer* is fourpence instead of threepence this week."

"Why's that?" asked his worship.

"Well, you see, sir, I don't quite know," replied the old woman plaintively. "Sometimes they puts the price up and I don't see it and I sells out all I've got at a loss before I find out. It depends on the sermons in it, I think, or else the serial. In this week, they find the murderer of Dyllys Davies, and so it's fourpence. But 'tisn't right."

"I should think not!" said the Mayor. "Most un-business-like."

He himself went home to carry out a piece of the business-like enterprise he so admired. Having cut out the advertisement of the mission and a copy of Alec's article, he pasted them with his own hands one on each window of the Famous Grocery. "Two birds with one stone," he murmured. "Jim," he called, "put those American cheeses and that bacon on the counter. We ought to be able to get rid of 'em to-day."

Whereupon he went off to the Blue Boar bar.

Miss Cora Sankey's voice was as cheerful as ever when she piped out: "'Morning, Mr. Trotman. How's the Wonder-Worker?'

"Who d'you mean?"

"Why your son, of course."

"My son is in Town—in London—at present. He went up with Sir Pushcott Bingley in the motor."

"He—he—he! And you not up there to look after him! Don't I wish I was there! I'd snap him up. I say, is it true he's made fifteen hundred pounds over the business?"

"He's minding his business."

"HE-He-he-he-he! Funny man! That's just ex-

actly what he ain't done, isn't it? Chip of the old block!"

Mr. Trotman turned to Mr. Ganthorn, who was also waiting in my Lord Alcohol. "Good *morning*, Ganthorn."

"I say, Mr. Mayor, are you all mad together? Hanged if I should like to be mixed up with such a pack of yellow press lies! Is the world coming to an end? Is it, I say?"

Mr. Trotman drank up in a gulp and walked out. It was an outrage on his feelings, this. Yet what headway could he hope to make against plain unbelief? You can argue, he thought, with a truthful opponent, whether he is right or not; but with a liar . . . Unless you lie too, you are lost.

The crowd around the windows of his shop compensated and mollified the Famous Grocer. People might say what they liked about his modesty and good taste. The upper hand was his. He was above taste and such-like. As he passed by they said, "There he is!" One man raised a cheer for 'our mayor.' Another, a base fellow, said "Yah!" It was like the progress of a cabinet minister into No. 10, Downing Street. It was, indeed, the grand climax of Mr. Trotman's private and public life, two sides of a man's existence which seldom enough have one and the same apotheosis.

Breakfast was not cleared away. Mrs. Trotman was still sitting over the tea-cups with the *Christian Endeavourer*. "They say here," she read, "that Alec's miracle is to be made sacred to the cause of religion."

"Is it?" said the Mayor with elaborate coolness. "No doubt Sir Pushcott will do what is best."

Mr. Trotman wrote out a shilling telegram to Alec, telling him that his father and mother would both be present at the Crystal Palace.

In less than an hour they received the reply : "Don't letter follows."

"We should make him nervous," said his mother.

"I'm not certain *I* shan't go incognito," said his father.

#### IV

Saturday evening, the evening for Alec's lecture, or sermon, or discourse—call it what you will—was come.

Never had there been such a well-advertised religious attraction in or near London. Progressively, for some years, the religious bodies had been losing their hold on the people. Freedom of worship, which each deplored and each took advantage of, had been followed by an even greater freedom in thought. Hardly could five hundred men and women be gathered together who wished to worship a Supreme Being in exactly the same fashion, with exactly the same accretions and excrescences on primitive pagan ceremonial, so superficially complex, and muddled with whimsicalities, had the modern religious mind become. The greatest eccentricities were tolerated provided they amused more people than they annoyed. Indeed, they were applauded and paid for if they captivated the classes or entertained and brought together the masses over whom religion pure and simple had no longer any power. Priests and pastors consigned people to hell when they dared, and called them to heaven when they didn't. They hurt nobody and their blandishments attracted nobody except the already faithful. The churches lived on themselves, ever praying God and the heathen to enter ; who both held aloof. No one, not even the bishops whose incomes were assured to them, thought the Sermon on the Mount sufficiently practical for modern needs. Some-

thing more in the nature of music-hall attractions was desiderated. The up-to-date advertisement agent was called into consultation, his tricky methods being renamed, for the occasion, psychology of the crowd. The end was to justify the means. "Better heaven in a motor bus than hell in a carriage and pair!" was a catchword that spread from pulpit to pulpit like an infectious disease, and thanks to a careful education by the Press in illogicality, it occurred to few people that there might be other ways of getting to either place.

Being desperate, all the sects in the land, with the exception of the Catholics, the Quakers and the Christian Scientists, joined in a vast revival mission. "Now or never!" was their watchword. Newspapers lent their aid, thereby gaining a considerable increase in advertisements and circulation. All was well that was to end well.

Englishmen not being sufficiently business-like, a party of thirteen Yankee revivalists who had met with astounding success on Coney Island, especially amongst the niggers, was hired to come and convert London, and to deliver it up once more unto the churches, washed in the tears of repentance and hysterics. So swift was the movement, so noisy and so well engineered, that the state church itself forgot for a moment that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. It ceased its dignified whimper on the subject of infidelity, and drew into line. It determined once and for all to become popular.

A prominent financier, as an unacknowledged penance for the misery created by his operations on the money-market, arranged with the railway companies that everyone who wished to travel to the Crystal Palace Empire Mission should be conveyed, third-class, free of charge. He was afterwards knighted. And the rail-

way companies, by running a small proportion of third-class carriages, and those of the horse-box variety, induced so many people to travel first-class, in order to avoid the crush, that an appreciable percentage was added to the year's dividend.

The revival itself, however, like so many before it, fell somewhat flat. Neither the huge admonitory texts hung from the walls and roof, nor the assembled people, succeeded in making the Crystal Palace other than the huge glass barn it is, more suitable for dog-shows than God-shows. London was prepared to be amused. It was prepared to sing when the hopping, bawling men on the platform, erected in front of the great organ, called upon it to sing. It was prepared to kneel on one knee on clean hassocks. It had no objection to repenting in the quietude of its own mind, provided the insanitary sackcloth and ashes were not insisted on. And it did not mind putting its hand in its pocket, to do the thing properly. But be publicly converted. . . . No ! London preferred to leave that to those who made a pastime or profession of it.

The mission languished. The divine spark, the precise line of enterprise, was wanting.

What joy there was, therefore, among the faithful when Sir Pushcott Bingley notified privately by telephone from Trowbury to the wire-pullers of the Empire Mission that Mr. Alexander Trotman, the Worker of the only authenticated Modern Miracle, might haply, at a cheap rate, appear at the Revival to support the distinguished revivalists and to give a short account of how he moved the Holy Mountain ! Strong support on the part of the *Halfpenny Press*, hitherto cool for want of advertisements, was guaranteed.

“ Done ! ” said the chief missionary through the telephone. “ He'll have to speak with the magnogramophone. When can we take his record ? ”

"Make it yourselves," replied Sir Pushcott, "but let me hear a proof cylinder."

A godsend ! A godsend !

London was plastered with bills. Sandwich-men disorganised the traffic. The *Halfpenny Press* agreed to act as ticket agent. London was about to capitulate before the onslaught of the intrepid revivalists. "That a young man of unique genius," said Saturday morning's *Halfpenny Press*, "should be powerful enough to move mountains and unselfish enough to lay his work and his genius at the feet of religion is an event of paramount national importance, worthy of national recognition."

In the correspondence columns a certain John A. Jenkins of Upper Norwood suggested that the Holy Mountain be offered, as a national thanksgiving, to him who had moved it.

Sir Pushcott Bingley had not hitherto exhibited Alec to the multitude, much less invited people to meet him at dinner. The public appearance of the Mountain Mover was to be dramatic ; and besides, he was not a very presentable young man. On Saturday evening, attended only by the *Halfpenny Pressman*, they travelled together to the Crystal Palace High Level Station. A few loungers, recognising them at Victoria, raised a faint cheer. That was all.

At the Crystal Palace they were received by a bevy of men in low collars and white ties, who combined a busy practical manner with an inspiring amount of sanctimoniousness. "We shall be ready (D.V.) in about fifteen minutes," said one of them to Sir Pushcott Bingley.

A young man with light curly hair, a pale pushful face and an ecclesiastical tie the colour of the day, drew Alec aside. "We are so thankful to you," he said in soft peculiarly suspended tones. "Through you the

Lord's Will *will* be done. Whom the Lord hath sent . . ." He looked like a High Church curate and snuffled like a hell-fire ranter out of the pulpit.

An old bishop of the Evangelical type who seemed very worried and confused, clasped Alec's hand in both his own—tremulous soft wrinkled old hands they were—murmuring hurriedly, "God bless you, my boy!" The gentle-faced old man was out of place at the Palace; flustered, weary, nearly overcome; and there was something in his voice and manner which brought tears to Alec's eyes. Perhaps he was reminded of Nurse Parfitt, perhaps of a nice old clergyman at Trowbury who used to give him sweets and, in spite of Mrs. Trotman's polite anger, had persisted in doing so.

The vigorous young man, the Reverend Algernon Jones, easily snatched Alec away from the old helpless bishop. "Perhaps you would like to see the service, only the congregation must not see *you*, else they would attend to nothing else. They are praying now, and then they will sing a revival hymn. Keep your overcoat on and come up here. Pull down your hat a little—so."

They ascended to a gallery whence they could take a full view of everything: the revivalists, backed by a half-moon of serious-faced clergy, on the platform before the great organ; the semicircle of plush-covered reserved seats (one shilling, five shillings, and a guinea), guarded by a crimson rope from the inferior souls to be saved; and the multitude which, for conversion purposes, was admitted free, stretching on either side to the uttermost ends of the Palace. High on the glass walls texts were hung, and four revolving search-lights illuminated them in turn, so that they shone like the wall-advertisements of patent foods in the squares of great cities, and the strength of God was blazoned forth like the strength of concentrated ox. A fifth

searchlight illuminated continuously an enormous text painted red, white, and blue, and hung in mid-air above the pipes of the organ. Alec read with a feeling very akin to fear : *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place : and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible to you.*

Most noticeable of all was an apparatus placed in the centre of the hall. Four large shining funnels stretched out from it towards the four walls of the building. It stood over and above the people, burnished and still, a power sent from the inexorable law-ordered world of science to the emotion-tossed and wavering world of religion.

A few moments after Alec and the Rev. Algernon Jones had arrived in the gallery, prayer came to an end. The congregation arose from its knees, or from a crouching position, as the case might be. What Alec saw was numberless white faces, and hymn-papers like butterflies—a multitude of insignificant human beings affixed to a multitude of significant hymn-papers. The searchlights turned to notices placed on either side of the platform—HYMN No. 7—then turned to the revivalists and remained playing on them. The organ from a wild prelude in imitation of a storm sank to a weird catchy march.

The revivalists placed themselves in a row—black clothes, white ties, and strenuous faces, all in a row. Aided by professional singers artfully distributed among the audience, they began to sing in penetrating nasal voices a hymn that had been concocted out of Robert Stephen Hawker's ballad, *The Silent Tower of Bottreau* :

Tintagel bells ring o'er the tide,  
The boy leans on his vessel's side ;  
He hears that sound and dreams of home,  
Soothe the wild orphan of the foam.

The strains of the organ changed to an emphatic march in the minor. The revivalists made as one man a half turn to the right. Keeping time with the music, they marched round the platform in a sort of goose-step or pedestrian cake-walk. As they tramped the searchlights followed them. And they sang in a loud voice, beckoning to the audience with their hands and white cuffs :

“Come to thy God in time !”  
Thus saith their pealing chime :

Then they turned right about face, marched the other way, and continued :

Youth, manhood, old age past,  
“Come to thy God at last.”

Those who could not enjoy the words of the ballad, because they could not catch them for the din, had at least unparalleled effects on the organ to amuse them. The revivalists went on in the same voices and with the same ceremonial :

But why are Bottreau’s echoes still ?  
Her tower stands proudly on the hill ;  
Yet the strange chough that home hath found,  
The lamb lies sleeping on the ground.  
“Come to thy God in time !”  
Should be her answering chime :  
“Come to thy God at last !”  
Should echo on the blast.

The ship rode down with courses free,  
The daughter of a distant sea :  
Her sheet was loose, her anchor stored,  
The merry Bottreau bells on board.

“Come to thy God in time !”

Ring out Tintagel chime ;

Youth, manhood, old age past,  
“Come to thy God at last !”

The pilot heard his native bells  
Hang on the breeze in fitful swells ;  
“Thank God,” with reverent brow he cried,  
“We make the shore with evening’s tide.”

“Come to thy God in time !”  
 It was his marriage chime ;  
 Youth, manhood, old age past,  
 His bell must ring at last.

“Thank God, thou whining knave, on land,  
 But thank, at sea, the steersman’s hand,”  
 The captain’s voice above the gale :  
 “Thank the good ship and ready sail.”  
 “Come to thy God in time !”  
 Sad grew the boding chime ;  
 “Come to thy God at last !”  
 Boomed heavy on the blast.

Uprose that sea ! as if it heard  
 The mighty Master’s signal-word :  
 What thrills the captain’s whitening lip ?  
 The death groans of his sinking ship.  
 “Come to thy God in time !”  
 Swung deep the funeral chime :  
 Grace, mercy, kindness past,  
 “Come to thy God at last !”

Long did the rescued pilot tell—  
 When grey hairs o’er his forehead fell,  
 While those around would hear and weep—  
 That fearful judgment of the deep.  
 “Come to thy God in time !”  
 He read his native chime :  
 Youth, manhood, old age past,  
 His bell rang out at last.

Redoubled storm effects on the organ shook the whole glass palace. It was as if the heavens were about to fall through the roof, or as if the whole vast edifice was going to ride off to hell like a witch on a broomstick. More and more had the audience joined in. The last verse was executed with an appalling roar, such that it seemed the revivalists must be crushed by the waves of sound advancing against them :

Still when the storm of Bottreau’s waves  
 Is wakening in his weedy caves :  
 Those bells that sullen surges hide,  
 Peal their deep notes beneath the tide :

“Come to thy God in time !”  
Thus saith the ocean chime :  
Storm, billow, whirlwind past,  
“Come to thy God at last !”

The audience came to an end of the words on the hymn-paper. The organ hushed itself to a whining melody afloat in the treble ; then died out. “Come to thy God in time !” the revivalists continued, singing in unison, unaccompanied, and beckoning with a great sweep of the arms to the congregation.

Come to thy God in time !  
Oh, that will be so fine !  
Now make your anchor fast,  
Come to thy God at last !

They bowed their heads ; and suddenly, to an inarticulate screech of the organ, they stretched out their cuffs, as if to buffet or to embrace the multitude, and shouted :

“Now—is—the time !”

Silence ! with the revivalists looking like broken monkeys on sticks.

Some among the audience fainted. Some shrieked. One or two had epileptic fits. Unconscious persons were hustled out of the doors by stewards. ’Twas a magnificent success. The Holy Spirit, it was said, was in their midst.

The Crystal Palace Empire Revival Mission was catching on.

## V

The revivalists pulled themselves together, hitched their disarranged coats into position, and stood expectantly in a row across the platform, as if to say : “We will do without your applause if we can have

your selves. How long, O people, how long ? ” When the emotional disorder created by the hymn had somewhat died down, the chief revivalist took up a large megaphone, and waving it from side to side, like an elephant’s trunk with a very swollen end, he spoke as follows :—

“ Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,—thank—you ! —Mr. Alexander—Trotman [applause]—has come—amongst us to-night—to tell us—something—about that great deed—of faith—in God—which moved—the Hill—the Holy Mountain—from Wiltshire—to London [applause].—As Mr.—Alexander Trotman—could—not hope—to make—himself—audible—to so mighty—a—concourse,—he has spoken—his—address—into—the—magnogramophone,—a powerful—instrument—kindly—lent us—by Messrs.—Edwards and Bellay,—the celebrated makers of acoustical instruments.—You will see—the modern doer—of miracles—on the—platform,—but the magnogramophone—will speak—his speech—for him—so that—you—may all hear [applause].—All ye works—of the—Lord,—praise ye—the Lord ! ” [Prolonged and loud applause.]

Alec, accompanied by the Halfpenny Pressman, walked on to the platform. The searchlights, which had been flashing about among the texts, turned their rays full upon him. That, together with the crackling applause, overwhelmed him so much that he blushed, closed his eyes, put his hands up like a man who has been hit and finds himself bleeding, and turned to go. He would have fled altogether had not one of the revivalists caught him by the arm and seated him forcibly in a chair, saying with a strong Yankee twang, “ Young man, sit there and do the Lord’s work.” Alec sat there, dumbfounded, and the searchlights were turned away so that not even those in the guinea seats could see him quite plainly.

A cockney voice came from the other end of the palace : " Young feller, does your mother know you're out ? "

Instantly a revivalist picked up the megaphone and replied, " Sir, do you know that this may be the most solemn evening of your life ? "

" Ay, ay ! Yes, yes ! " groaned many of the faithful.

" Damn'd if I du ! " retorted a voice with a strong Devon accent.

" Throw them out ! Throw them out ! " was shouted.

Before there was time for a general laugh to gather force, the organ began to play, and the cockney and Devonian so in need of conversion were bundled out of doors.

" Now—dear—friends,—listen ! " shouted the megaphone.

The searchlights were shuttered and many of the electric lights switched off, until the Palace seemed like a vast glass cavern. In the centre, from the apparatus with the four shining funnels, there emerged a faint whirr of electrical machinery ; then a mechanical voice of that peculiar timbre which reminds one of cardboard.

It was like a voice from the other side of the grave. It made sensitive people shudder. Yet behold ! before the audience was Alexander Trotman, the owner in a sense of the voice, seated very awkwardly on the platform with the revivalists in a semicircle round him, and the respectable clergy, who envied the revivalists' results but could not bring themselves to imitate their methods, seated in a larger semicircle round the revivalists.

" Friends," the machinery said, " I have come here to-night to tell you something about the Holy Mountain, as it is now called. How the hill, containing many thousand tons of earth, was actually transported, I

cannot say. We do not know what actually *did* the miracles recorded in Holy Writ. All we know is what happened, and that the miracles were done. We must not inquire too closely into the workings of the divine Mind, into the actions of the divine Hand.

“We must have faith. Faith !

“All we know is, that a miracle needs faith for its accomplishment.

“And it was by an act of faith that I moved the Holy Mountain. It was not my strength, but His.

“Let me tell you how it happened.”

A threatening ebullition of applause was suppressed by the man with the megaphone.

“I walked up to the Downs,” the magnogramophone continued, “near Trowbury, my native place, last Sunday evening, with a young lady to whom I was tenderly attached. We had been to church, and had heard the preacher speak on those beautiful hopeful words, ‘If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place ; and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible to you.’ And when we were on the Downs with naught but the free air between us and heaven, between us and God, I felt filled with prayer and faith. I guess I was lifted above myself.

“With faith I prayed that the hill before us, Rams-horn Hill, should remove to Acton, where I was about to go myself.

“Dear friends, it did remove.

“Great is the power of the Almighty !”

The mechanical voice was drowned in a chorus of applause and ejaculations. “There is—something—more,—dear friends. Listen—to—the rest !” shouted the megaphone man.

Two or three sentences being lost, the magnogramophone concluded with : “I only hope to be able to

devote the power God has given me, and the miracle I have wrought with God's help, to the sacred cause of a new, powerful and non-sectarian Christianity, without which our ever-glorious British Empire cannot hope to stand."

With a final whirr and click, the machinery ceased talking. The organ struck up another hymn. Unfortunately for the decorum of the revival, some coarse fellow in the audience began to sing *For he's a jolly good fellow!* The infection of it spread like the plague. Soon all those who were not laughing or crying, or drawing long faces, joined lustily in singing :

For he's a jolly good fel-low !  
For he's a jolly good fel-low !  
For he's a jolly good fel-low !  
And so say all of us !

It rang through the huge glass Palace, defying the utmost efforts of the revivalists, who with much gesticulation attempted to sing. It was repeated and reiterated. Over and over again the audience roared it. Handkerchiefs waved. Hats flew. A rush to view Alec, on the part of the third-class people in the free seats, all but ended in panic.

At length, when the uproar had nearly ceased, owing to the audience's attention being diverted to those who were taken ill, a revivalist addressed the people with the megaphone :

“ Let—us—pray ! ”

And the British audience, with propriety—in which lies safety—ever waiting somewhere at the back of its mind, squatted in prayer.

At this moment, Alec (the magnogramophone's address had surprised no one so much as its reputed author), Sir Pushcott Bingley and the Halfpenny Pressman left the Palace. As they moved along the railway platform towards the special train which had been kept

ready for them, a tall red-faced man, whose silk hat was exceedingly lustrous, planted himself before them.

"Evening, Sir Pushcott. Well ! Eh ? I'll give him three hundred a week for one appearance nightly at the Neapolitan."

"Oh !" said Sir Pushcott in non-committal fashion.

"Will he sign the contract, three hundred pounds a week ?"

The music-hall manager was taking from the pocket of his fur-lined coat a paper and a fountain pen.

"No contracts," said Sir Pushcott.

"Well, will he come ?"

"He won't speak."

"Then what the devil's the good of him ?—Look here, Sir Pushcott, will he be the central figure in a patriotic ballet ?"

"Very well. Fifty pounds a night. No speaking. No formal obligation to appear : that'll be all right.—You'd better close with him, Mr. Alexander."

"All right," said Alec patiently.

He had a stomach-ache.

## VI

Sunday morning in Trowbury—at Sir Pushcott Bingley's Alec lay in bed thinking about Trowbury—was very fair and restful. Rains during the night had cleared and cooled the air. Only an occasional footstep, or some milk-cart rattling along behind a young horse, and the tinkling of single bells for early service, woke the stillness that did indeed seem to be hallowed. When Julia Jepp raised an upper window at the Emporium in the Station Road, she heard the clocks of the town one after another strike seven. The unpunctuality

of the chimes, which could not all have been correct, gave her, who seldom had the opportunity of noticing such things, a very blessed sense of leisure. Sunday means so much to young people at Emporiums.

On a bed the other side of the room, a head, almost hidden between a quantity of loose yellow hair and the bedclothes, stirred itself.

“*Do shut that window, Miss Jepp.*”

“*It’s a lovely morning.*”

“There’s such a thing as fresh air ; but some people don’t seem to think there’s such a thing as draughts.”

“All right,” returned Miss Jepp with a touch of despondency in her tone.

It is not to be denied that Julia shut down the window more noisily than she need have done. Having slept badly, she welcomed the fresh cool air on her face. For several nights now she had slept badly. Years spent in drapery establishments had taught her to wade lightly down a stream of petty jealousies, spites and squabbles, which would have worried many a stronger and more fortunate woman to distraction. Miss Julia Jepp was notoriously a cool hand, and was also an object of admiration, strictly secret, on the part of the more hysterical ; an admiration which chiefly showed itself in envy when things went well, and calls for help when they did not.

Nevertheless, all in one week to concern herself charitably with Miss Starkey, and to break off an engagement which, though tacit, had been none the less a lantern to her thoughts . . . That was too much, even for Julia Jepp’s equanimity. Though she felt proud and at times happy at being in the middle of things —real, live, romantic affairs ;—though she certainly seemed less stagnant to herself ; she was harassed and fevered, and, therefore, she was cross because the other inmates of the room would not let her remain, her head,

bubbling with thoughts and schemes, poked out into the morning air.

She got back into bed, sneezed once or twice, and dreamed that she was preventing Edith Starkey from committing suicide.

At breakfast she rapped out a very caustic remark to the young lady who had wanted the window shut. That made her feel better. She decided to go to church in the morning and to go and see Miss Starkey, at Mrs. Parfitt's cottage, in the afternoon. It occurred to her that considering all that had happened, and what was about to take place, she ought in prudence not to have overmuch to do with the unfortunate girl. "Never mind!" she said to herself resolutely. The same motherliness which had first attracted her to Alec, now caused her also to go and see, and to scheme for, Edith Starkey.

At five minutes to eleven she found herself entering St. Thomas's Church. She had no qualms as to the appearance of her yellow costume. It fitted her perfectly. She followed the verger up the carpeted aisle, went to the remotest corner of the pew indicated, knelt down, and prayed wordlessly.

It is a tendency of almost all grown-up people, when they are distressed, to revert to the comforters of their youth. So with Julia. When a girl she had not liked church any better than most children; but to-day St. Thomas's, which reminded her of quiet childish hours and of one or two childish attempts to talk to God like real holy people, calmed her magically. The prosperity of the congregation, who looked as if they had never known what heart-fret was; the noiselessness and the good manners; the General Confession, which by including all sinfulness made each sin seem as naught; the *Te Deum*, the hymns, and the deliberate voice of the preacher, not one of whose words she could

recollect a moment after it had been spoken—all this settled her thoughts and comforted her. And afterwards, to come out from the dim porch into the brilliant July sunlight, among the chattering people, greeting one another heartily; to walk back in the sunshine with the only good dinner of the week awaiting her . . . A strength of purpose (in regard to Alec and Miss Starkey) and a feeling of Sunday peace, the calm of ceremonies that had been repeated from time immemorial, took possession of her mind.

In the late afternoon she walked slowly out, beneath a yellow parasol with lace trimmings, to see Miss Starkey. According to all expectation that young lady ought to have been tragic, or at least hysterical. Julia was almost shocked to find her tolerably comfortable; merely a little discontented and querulous on account of the cottage's distance from town goings-on. She seemed entirely to have forgotten the scene which had taken place at her Trowbury lodgings. She talked about clothes, about Mrs. Parfitt, about the dust. She laughed gaily.

Mrs. Parfitt had in some ways rather taken to her. She said the young lady was cheery for a lonely old 'oman and praised the way she bore up under her bad luck.

At tea, Julia herself almost forgot the real state of affairs, until Mrs. Parfitt asked her: "Now do 'ee, my dear, tell I all you d' know about Master Alec. They say as he be givin' an entertainment at the Crystal Palace. I did go there meself before nursin' Master Alec. 'Tis a wonderful place, for sure; all glass—clear as crystal—and they got a lucky-bag there what you dips into."

Julia repeated all she knew, but the subject of Alexander Trotman distressed even while it pleased her. She wondered above all how Miss Starkey could chatter about him so freely. She felt she had to get

away from the cottage—there was no guiding the old nurse's tongue ;—and though it went sadly against the grain to be seen in the town itself with Miss Starkey she proposed church.

“ I'm chapel,” said Miss Starkey.

“ I've never been to chapel in my life.”

“ Let's go. I want to see a bit of what's going on.”

“ But I shan't know what to do in chapel,” Julia protested.

“ Oh, never mind that. No one does much. I'll poke you when you've got to get up and down.”

They walked back to Trowbury—Miss Starkey seemed shamefully unashamed—and joined the people who were flocking into one of the chapels. The stern pale old men, successful tradesmen of a retired generation, the very provincially smart wives and the unnaturally decorous children were all somewhat alien to Julia. She was astonished at the earnestness and at the apparently soul-tearing groans of approval ; most astonished at the extemporary prayers. The vigour of the service, the heavy ugliness of the building, made her feel light-minded by contrast—who had been so calmed by the morning's service at St. Thomas's. It made her serious, if it did not make her worship. It certainly increased her sense of the gravity of life. In other words, it upset her again, and it was distinctly a relief when, on regaining the street, Miss Starkey remarked flippantly : “ There ! That's the first time I've been to chapel for ages, and I daresay it'll be the last. Not bad, is it ? ”

Miss Starkey would again have talked about Alexander Trotman had not Julia revolted. The conversation flagged. Julia worried in silence. Though she ached to know something for certain, they were nearly at Mrs. Parfitt's gate before she brought herself to ask : “ Edie, tell me who it was.”

"Who what was?"

"Who he was—you know."

"Catch me!" said Miss Starkey. "You wouldn't."

The peaceful day had, of its very peacefulness, given Julia a hope that it was not Alec after all who was responsible for her friend's misfortune. But now . . . "Ah!" she said to herself, "she's forgotten that she let it out when she had hysterics the other night." And Julia imagined herself saying all sorts of tragic things to all sorts of people.

When she was in bed, she wept because she would not—could not, she put it to herself—marry Alexander Trotman.

## VII

Another, a far less edifying but much more amusing scene was enacted that Sunday evening.

Mr. Ganthorn's servant spent her time from half-past nine to ten o'clock in bidding a long "So long!" to her sweetheart. Then, as the clock struck, she said: "Bye-bye, 'Arry. You *must* go now. Ta-ta."

Whereupon the young man peeped outside the gate, returned to take another kiss from his fair lady, and did go. The front door banged. A light flitted about. Within five minutes the dwelling and its precincts were quite quiet.

Such an idyllic little scene could hardly have taken place had Mrs. Ganthorn been at home. She was visiting her unmarried sister, where, indeed, the childless woman stayed during the greater part of the year; for she found that distance lent a very considerable enchantment to her sharp little husband. He, on his side, quickly lived down the gossip which had its origin in an absentee wife. Away, she could not gall his cool

sceptical intellect with her sloppy emotionalism ; and the arrangement was particularly happy in that it left him a much greater freedom to entertain his friends.

Mr. Ganthorn's back sitting-room was a place outside the meaning of the Acts which have from time to time been passed in the hope of putting a check to drinking and gambling. It was, in fact, an unregistered, uninspected club. When completely sober, he was an objectionable little man ; everybody in Trowbury knew that ; but when he had taken something to drink he was the best of hosts ; hospitable, pungent and amusing, according to the standards of Trowbury ; and, above all, when his wife was away he could without let or hindrance invite anybody and everybody to take a glass or glasses at his house at any hour of the day or night.

Shortly after the maid-servant had gone to bed, he came up the street attended by Messrs. Trotman, Clinch and Borbell—the last-named being a cattle dealer of astonishing dimensions and reputed wealth. The time of night was five minutes past ten ; precisely five minutes, that is, after the closing of the Blue Boar bar.

The merry party stood outside the gate for a while, looking at the stars, smoking, and waiting for Mr. Ganthorn formally to invite them in.

“ Young George Potterne's going it, isn't he ? ” Mr. Clinch was saying.

“ Ought to have been turned out an hour before closing time to-night,” said Mr. Trotman. “ I'd have a law to prevent all young fellows drinking before they're twenty-five or so.”

“ Did you ? ” Mr. Ganthorn asked.

“ I knew when to stop. . . .”

“ More than you do now, old chap.”

There was a hearty laugh, broken into by the husky

voice of Mr. Borbell, who said in his hearty fashion, “He’s like his grandfather. . . .”

“*You didn’t know his wussup’s grandfather.*”

Another laugh.

“Young George Potterne, I means. I mind buying scores of beasts from old John James Potterne. I’ve driven many a hard bargain with him when he was sober, but when he was a bit in liquor . . . Lor’ bless you ! he always got the top hand o’ me then.”

“Who’s that got the better of you, Borbell ?”

“Why, as I was saying, old John James Potterne did—when he’d had a drop. And what’s bred in the bone comes out in the flesh, I say. All they Potternes be twice the men drunk to what they be sober.”

“So are we all. All !” said Mr. Ganthorn. “Now, gentlemen, what brew of wet damnation is it tonight ?”

By this time they were all well inside the house. “Try another chair, Borbell,” said Mr. Ganthorn. The general laugh was increased to a roar of merriment when he added, “My wife bought that little one at the Emporium the last time she visited me.”

It is not difficult to understand why Mr. Ganthorn, in spite of his acidity, was accounted the best entertainer in Trowbury. He dug at all his guests impartially, so putting them at ease with one another ; and when that can be brought about, of what importance comparatively is the nature of the host ?

A violent knocking at the door was heard.

“George Potterne himself, I’ll lay five to one—in threepenny bits,” exclaimed Mr. Ganthorn.

“Done !” replied Mr. Borbell.—“Damme, ‘tis ! I thought I knew his knock better than that.”

George Potterne lurched in. “Thought you’d given me the slip, did you ?” he greeted them. “I was up to your little tricks. Trust me ! The three of you won

seventeen and tenpence out of me last Thursday. Now you've got to give me my revenge."

"No cards on Sunday," said Mr. Trotman, "or I go."

Mr. Ganthorn took up the cue. "Look here, George, you're in my house, and I shan't have card-playing on Sunday."

"Course not," Mr. Borbell added. "You youngsters don't care for hog, dog, or devil nowadays."

George Potterne was fumbling in his inside breast-pocket. "Look here, you chaps," he went on with unsober inconsequence, "I've got something to show you 'll make you sit up." He pulled out a red morocco pocket-book.

"Who gave you that, George?"

"My sister. Rather nice, ain't it? Better'n most women's presents.—There look! How d'you like that? Latest from Paris. Got it when I was up in Town."

"What were you up in Town for?"

"Never you mind."

A card, shaped like a folded butterfly, was handed round.

"Pretty toy for boys," Mr. Ganthorn remarked. "I've seen better."

Mr. Clinch turned it over and over, opened it and shut it two or three times, as if he would have liked to stock it at the Emporium. "Cleverly got up," he observed.

Mr. Borbell said he had done with things of that sort, whilst the Mayor, after a lengthy and rather shame-faced examination, said emphatically: "If I had my way, I'd soon put an end to things of that sort. Disgraceful!"

"Get out, you old fool!" George Potterne exclaimed. "You'd like one if you could get it quiet—and on the cheap."

"You or me had better go, I think," said his worship with dignity. "If ever you get brought up before me . . ."

"Dry up!"

"Look here, George," Mr. Ganthorn interposed; "you and your butterfly had better go. Time all young people were in bed. Sunday too."

"Shan't! I want a game o' nap."

"Let's see. . . . How much is it you owe me? Two five-pound notes, six pounds in gold, ten-and-six for whiskey. . . ."

"All right, old chap. You've got security—took good care of that. I'm going. You needn't throw a fellow's debts in his face."

"You try throwing what you owe me into mine."

"Oh, shut up!"

Exit Mr. George Potterne, Junior.

For a few minutes the remaining four men sipped their drinks in silence.

Said Mr. Clinch at last: "Who's going to be mayor next year?"

"You, of course. It's your turn."

"I can't, I tell you. I can't. Expenses of enlargement and bad debts. . . ."

"You'll have to if we make you, or else pay up the fifty-pound fine."

"Look here, I can't; not next year. I can't really. A bit later—then I'll be mayor willingly, and do the job well."

"Who *is* to be mayor then?"

"I tell you what, gentlemen," said Mr. Borbell with mock solemnity. "Mr. Trotman here is always talking about Trowbury, and saying it only wants to be known how progressive and pretty and cetera the town is for people with money to come and live here, and works and businesses and such-like. Well, his son's been

and got hisself known with a vengeance if the newspapers is true. Why don't you make Mr. Alec Trotman mayor ? ”

“ What ! ” cried Mr. Trotman. But it was evident the idea pleased him.

“ Make young Trotman mayor,” continued Mr. Borbell. “ No reason as I can see why a son shouldn't follow his father. You were pleased enough when young Paton was mayor just before his father died and only a year after his father too.”

“ The expense . . . ” Mr. Trotman began.

“ Pooh ! ” exclaimed Mr. Ganthorn. “ Don't tell me you haven't made anything out of the mayor's salary. I'd keep the office in the family if I were you.”

“ He'll make some money out of this Holy Mountain job, won't he ; or you will ? ”

“ I can't say,” replied Mr. Trotman. “ And I'm not at liberty to tell you anything about it. You can see all there is to be known in the newspapers.”

“ In the *Halfpenny Press* ? ” Mr. Ganthorn jeered.

“ Let's have a rubber of whist,” said Mr. Trotman.

“ Thought you didn't play cards on Sunday ? ”

“ Twill be Monday by the time you've got the cards out and dealt.”

“ Well, anyhow, is it settled young Trotman's to be mayor next year ? ”

“ Yes, of course 'tis. Isn't it, Trotman ? ”

“ If the town confers that honour. . . . ”

“ Drat the town and its honour ! We're the honourable town. If we say so, he will be, and then let 'em object if they like and how they like. That's done. Cut for partners. Shilling points ? Refresh your glasses, gentlemen. Forget yourselves.”

With full glasses, free tongues, and a merry pack of cards, will we leave the leading burgesses of Trowbury.

The game obliterated all discussion about the Holy Mountain. The petrified brains of Trowbury were, indeed, unfitted to deal with anything that had developed to such dimensions and intricacy. London might stir itself ; but Trowbury . . . It was the centre of the storm and, as such, calm.

## VIII

On Monday morning both Mrs. Trotman and Julia received Sunday letters from Alec.

He told his mother shortly that he was enjoying himself awfully in London and that everybody was awfully nice ; that Sir Pushcott Bingley was very nice and very busy ; that Mr. Fulton took him all about London on a motor car ; that lots of people seemed to know him ; that a gramophone thing had spoken for him at the Crystal Palace, where the light had hurt his eyes and he didn't know whether it was supposed to be minstrels or a service. Finally, he said that he didn't much like wine and that he had a rather awful stomach-ache. He omitted to say that he was engaged to appear in a patriotic ballet at a music-hall. In fact, he hardly realised it himself.

The stomach-ache took up the major part of Mrs. Trotman's attention. She greatly feared that stomach-ache, and would at once have set out for London had not her husband pooh-poohed the idea and called her a silly old hen—the one gibe which always tamed her solicitude for her son. After much worry and more talk, she contented herself with sending to Alec by express post a large-sized bottle of the local chemist's Electric Stomach Elixir.

His letter to Julia Jepp was considerably longer :—

"DEAR JULIE,—You did not mean what you said when I was leaving Trowbury, did you? I do love you, Julie. Write and say you did not, I cannot think why you did.

"Julie, I'm having such an awfully jolly time and everybody is awfully kind and lots of people know me. They are not so stuck up in London as they are in Trowbury.

"You never saw such a lot of people as there were at the Crystal Palace to hear me speak. I should think there were nearly a million or at least 10,000, all there to hear your Alec speak and I didn't make a speech after all, I'll tell you really only you must not split or else Mr. Fulton says the game will be up if people get to know. Mr. Fulton and a clergyman from the mission made up a speech for me and made me read it out twice for practice. Then I spoke it into a gramophone thing and it was a great big one with four big funnels that spoke it for me at the Crystal Palace, only it wasn't mine really. I never saw such a lot of people, you could not nearly see to the end of them and their faces were like confetti what they throw at weddings. There were a lot of bishops there and all sorts, when the machine had finished talking they clapped and made such a noise and sang for he's a jolly good fellow several times and then a man said let us pray through a speaking trumpet and Sir Pushcott Bingley said for God's sake let's get out of this and we went.

"I've got to go to the Neeopolitan Music Hall tomorrow, but not speak. Sir P. says speaking is not my strong point, he says it is better for me to be ornamental. He has not asked me to write an article for his paper yet, but I expect he will soon. He says I shall have quite enough money to do what I want to on and perhaps more if things go all right, I wish I could go with you on the Downs to-night. I have been on a motor

with Mr. Fulton to see Ramshorn Hill in Acton, it looks miserable and dirty. Hoping this will find you well as it leaves me only I have got a stummycake.—Your loving ever and ever

“ ALEXANDER TROTMAN.”

Nothing but real love could have given Chop-Allie Trotman the energy to make such a prodigious effort in the way of letter writing.

Julia was proud and frightened and softened by turns. But Alec's success did in the end only strengthen her determination to go on being a martyr. It made her feel a good and disinterested onlooker. It overcame her motherliness. The worst vices of such women as Julia Jepp are virtues out of place.

## IX

Whilst Mrs. Trotman was suffering from suppressed solicitude for Alexander's digestion—was taking the servant into her confidence and pouring forth a tale of gastric woe—Mr. Trotman sat over his third cup of tea with the calm air of a philosopher and man of sense, and read the morning's *Halfpenny Press*.

“ If Alec is really ill,” he said, “ you can be quite sure Sir Pushcott will have the best doctors. There's nothing second-rate about Sir Pushcott Bingley.”

“ No, I know there's not,” said Mrs. Trotman in tones of unconviction.

“ Well, then, for goodness' sake be quiet ! ”

The *Halfpenny Press* was indeed most interesting. It contained a special four-page supplement, filled with pictures of the Crystal Palace Empire Revival Mission and a squib-like account thereof. No less than one

whole page was given up to correspondence, *From Our Readers*—a score of donkeys nibbling at a carrot.

One busybody of the parasitical world which collects and administers subscriptions said at great length that, in the case of the Wonder Worker being left unrewarded, he was prepared to receive sums of money from a halfpenny (only the price of a newspaper) upwards, towards the cost of purchasing a life annuity for him who had shown mankind that miracles were as possible in this our twentieth century as in the olden days. Such a demonstration, the busybody pointed out, could but infuse courage into the hearts of all those who were fighting the good fight on behalf of the immutable truths of religion.

An editorial note, however, while commending the busybody as a truly religious patriot, mentioned that proposals were already afoot in high and influential circles to give the Holy Mountain to Mr. Alexander Trotman, the mover of it; or, at least, to lease it to him from the Crown on very advantageous terms. Ramshorn Hill, now justly called the Holy Mountain, being Crown land, was national property, and, therefore, this brilliant proposal would enable every British man, woman, and child substantially to show their gratitude to Mr. Trotman—whether they wished to or not. *Vox populi, vox Dei!* In such a way the right-minded majority could compel the careless, unpatriotic, irreligious minority to contribute towards that recognition which no Britisher should wish to deny. There could be no shadow of doubt that Mr. Trotman would use the gift in such a way that the best interests of religion and the glory of the British Empire would be equally advanced. So said the *Halfpenny Press*.

Notice was given that the Neapolitan Music Hall would be closed on that (Monday) evening in order to prepare a grand patriotic Church and Empire Ballet

in which Mr. Alexander Trotman would take part. The Mountain Mover would thus be visible to all who were unable or unaccustomed to attend revivals. The *Half-penny Press* would book orders for seats by telephone. A letter from the Archbishop of All the Empire's chaplain ran : " His Grace desires me to say that he considers the Church and Empire Ballet, reverently treated, to be an excellent idea."

On the morrow, the only authorised biography of Mr. Alexander Trotman would commence in the columns of the *Halfpenny Press*. It would be written, under Mr. Trotman's supervision, by that brilliant journalist and *littérateur*, Mr. John Fulton.

The front page of the newspaper was taken up in its entirety by an advertisement of the Neapolitan Music Hall—refined, mirthful, beautiful, national, fully licensed. Half the back page was devoted to a glowing advertisement of the *Times*'s monumental work on earthquakes. The remaining portions of the paper were occupied by short synopses of foreign affairs and parliamentary proceedings, and accounts of three interesting murders and two peculiarly distressing suicides. Publicity was given to an unconfirmed telegram which reported that an Indian fakir had succeeded in overturning the summit of Mount Everest.

It was very noticeable that the *Halfpenny Press*, hitherto in frantic opposition to the inefficiency and inertia of the government, was now become a supporter of the ministry and looked forward to a long life of beneficence for it.

" That is curious, if you like ! " remarked Mr. Trotman judicially.

## X

The Neapolitan, famous even among music-halls for its topicality and its original turns, did not now belie its reputation. There was no precedent in the theatrical world for the energy with which the Church and Empire Ballet was hustled upon the stage nor for the vigour with which it was advertised. The properties of a patriotic ballet were sorted out on the Sunday. Ecclesiastical costumes and apparatus were gathered together on the Monday morning. One or two clergymen, believers in the possibilities of stage influence for good, gave ready help in matters of which the management possessed but little experience. Scene-painters worked day and night with pneumatic paint-brushes, inventing and adapting. Opticians busied themselves with dissolving views and novel effects in stage lighting. The orchestra practised with its food and drink on stools beside it. Rehearsals were almost continuous ; the stage manager's voice filled the hall without intermission. The production of the Church and Empire Ballet was, indeed, a work of concerted theatrical genius.

One grand dress rehearsal—and that without the central figure of the ballet—took place on Tuesday. Alec, in fact, was the most indispensable and the least necessary personage in the whole affair. Sir Pushcott Bingley's stipulation that he should have nothing to say and nothing to do, except be present on the stage, was ridiculed by the manager, who staked his reputation on being able to drill the young man into something that would catch on. Sir Pushcott therefore invited him to meet Mr. Alexander Trotman at lunch. There the manager drew him affably into conversation, and soon became finally convinced that the Wonder Worker had better remain quite a lay figure.

Nevertheless, he kept one small item up his sleeve.

Alec was duller than usual. The unwonted stir and excitement had completely dazed him. Besides which, he was in pretty constant pain, and now that the bloom of his visit to London had worn off, he was also rather homesick. He hungered after the ministrations of his mother. The delights of Sir Pushcott's table kept up his spirits somewhat ; but his appetite was failing, and at lunch on Tuesday he would take nothing except a little lobster salad.

" We shall have to get the doctor to you, young man, I can see," said Sir Pushcott Bingley.

" Dr. Vere M'Lloyd ? " Alec asked.

It was the name of his mother's favourite physician at Trowbury.

Most successful men attribute their success to some one virtue that comes easy to them. In Sir Pushcott's case, the fetish was punctuality. Arriving at the Neapolitan rather too early, they were shown into a stage box.

" Sit back," the manager told Alec. " We shan't want you till the last moment. But be ready when you're called. There'll be a row if we're too long getting it on. Our house isn't used to much curtain. Sit back—here."

Alec sat back as requested, and watched a bare-chested woman in black tights showing off her troupe of performing cats. The band played ; the woman strutted about the stage, tapping the cats with a beribboned cane, bowing to the music, to the cats and to the audience like a mechanical toy. How much more dignified the snarling cats than the swaggering woman ! Alec was delighted with them, and would have clapped naïvely had not the Halfpenny Pressman touched him on the arm and held up a warning finger.

The performer kissed herself and her cats off the stage

amid a moderate applause. She was a falling star. The Church and Empire Ballet was to come.

For some time the curtain remained down to the music of the orchestra and the stage hammers. The audience began to be impatient. They whistled, they stamped, they boo'd. Somebody flung a ginger-beer bottle at the curtain. It hit a painted languishing Italian lover on the nose so neatly that one of the gallery gods cried out, "Give 'em another just there!" An orange followed. A penny bun, being less weighty, fell short and hit the conductor of the orchestra on the head. The most softly captivating, and the loudest, strains of the orchestra were alike powerless to check the rising enthusiasm for this music-hall version of Old Aunt Sally. Turning down the lights only made the musicians' heads into the target, instead of the lovers on the curtain. A flautist had a tooth knocked out and his skilful lip cut.

Suddenly Long Willie, the popular comedian of the moment, bounced along the stage before the curtain. He stretched out a ragged skinny arm, made a familiar face, and shouted, "Just you wait a minute. I'll revive you!"

A quick change and he re-entered as a typical revivalistic parson. The audience, at the gleeful sanctimoniousness of his face and walk, burst into a roar of laughter.

The painted lovers and the musicians' heads were saved.

Long Willie pulled some underclothing out of the end of his trouser-leg and placed it on the ground to imitate a little hill. On the top of it he carefully planted a flower. Then, having retired a few paces, he walked towards the little hill, his eyes cast heavenwards and his finger downwards, saying: "Get thee to the George and Dragon. I am coming." He tripped, fell back-

wards on the little hill, squashing it, and rose like a schoolboy after a caning. "How I move mountains!" he shouted.

The audience shrieked with merriment. Alec hid his head. Sir Pushcott Bingley reddened and rang the bell.

The manager himself appeared.

"Stop that!" Sir Pushcott commanded.

"What?"

"That travesty. Stop it."

"But I can't."

"We go at once. . . ."

"Well . . . Can't see what there is to object . . . All right."

Long Willie was called off the stage.

Before long the manager returned to the box for Alec. Already the orchestra was playing *Rule Britannia*. Alec was led behind the scenes, among a marvellous complexity of girders, beams, ropes, and properties—all the hastily prepared paraphernalia of the Church and Empire Ballet. Right at the back of the stage they came to a large mound, an imitation hill, against which there rested a ladder. The manager placed in Alec's hand a stick with a bit of red, white and blue cloth nailed to it. "Look here," he said, "when you hear them begin *God Save the King*, you stand up and wave this. D'you see? That's all you've got to do. When they play *God Save the King*, mind; not before."

Alec took the stick. He was just sufficiently confused to do what he was told without demur; to put his trust in anybody and nobody. And that gnawing pain. . . .

"Now then, up you go! You'll find a place to sit on at the top. Stay there till you hear *God Save the King*, and then . . . You know."

"All right," said Alec. The pain made his breath short.

He climbed the ladder on all fours, like a dog going upstairs, sat down, and waited. The ladder rose on its end, turned over, disappeared. Time seemed long up there, and the place all the darker for the little light that filtered in. He was almost frightened ; was wondering indeed whether the hill was safe to slide down, until a voice came up from below : " Y'all right there ? "

" Yes," replied Alec manfully.

" They've started. Remember ! "

A young man, sitting on an artificial eminence in semi-darkness at the back of a London stage, and wishing himself at home in a sleepy country town. . . .

## XI

Never in theatrical history had exceedingly powerful magic lanterns, cinematographs and dissolving view apparatuses been so brilliantly combined with all the ordinary spectacular and panoramic resources of the stage. Hardly any among the enormous and enthusiastic audience which crowded the Neapolitan Music Hall—sitting, standing, lounging, in defiance of County Council regulations—hardly any, except some scientists present, could tell where illusion ended and make-believe began, so triumphantly had stagecraft and optics come to the aid of Church, Empire and the management.

To the strains of *Rule Britannia* the curtain rose, disclosing another on which was painted (or optically cast) a map of the world, on Mercator's projection, with the British Imperial Possessions coloured a very bright red.

A moving finger appeared, pointing to the British Isles. It travelled to the prairies of Canada, and thence, across the continent of North America, down the

Atlantic Ocean, to the malarial West Coast of Africa. By way of St. Helena, it proceeded to the Transvaal ; then crossed the Indian Ocean and Australia to antipodal New Zealand. From the northern islands of Australasia it moved to India and up the Red Sea to Egypt. It traversed the Mediterranean, resting a moment at Gibraltar. Finally, ascending the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel it pointed exactly at London.

Whereupon the finger changed to the Royal Standard and the Union Jack, interlaced, with a cross between them ; and the emblem swelled and grew till it spread all over the world. *Rule Britannia* was repeated at the orchestra's loudest. Everything faded. The music ceased.

There was much applause.

The curtain rose again on a scene of embarkation. To the tune of *See the Conquering Hero Comes* there passed slowly and with dignified gait across the stage, to a great ship, missionaries with rapt looks, bearing crosses, and privates of the army in fighting kit with rifles ; colporteurs bearing Bibles of all shapes and sizes, and engineers with matlocks, spades and surveying instruments ; red-cross nurses and sisters of medical missions ; clergymen and merchants carrying Brummagem ware wrapped up in the flag ; dignitaries of the Church and pipe-clayed officers of the army ; finally a field-marshall in full uniform together with a bishop in cope and mitre, who had borne before him a richly jewelled pastoral staff on which the lights of the music-hall flashed and glittered.

The martial music changed imperceptibly into a hymn, and, whilst the audience listened in wonder to the noises of a ship getting under way, the stage became totally dark.

A transfused glimmer brightened into sunshine and disclosed an Indian encampment in old Canada. Afar,

snow-clad mountains were brightly visible ; in the foreground stood several wigwams about which squaws were busy with their primitive household work. A party of Red Indians approached warily with hostile intent. One of them sprang forward, yelling his war-cry, and seized by the hair a beautiful girl who was reclining in the entrance of the largest wigwam. To keep her quiet, he knocked her on the head. The owners of the wigwams returned bearing spoils of the chase from which blood dripped. There was a fierce fight, so wild that the audience could distinguish plainly neither the combatants nor what they were about. They saw only, with tight apprehension, the beautiful girl being dragged backwards and forwards across the stage. Tomahawks flourished. Bloody scalps swung on high. Then it was that the Church and Empire Procession passed along the side of the stage, rifles to shoulder and the emblems of religion held aloft. The fighters were stricken into stillness. The light died down.

When next the stage was illuminated, the Indians were seen squatted by their wigwams and smoking the pipe of peace. Certain members of the Church and Empire joined in the ceremony, whilst the remainder stood by, singing a hymn. The beautiful girl and a fine young chief were married by the bishop according to Christian rites. The Indians arose and fell in with the Church and Empire Procession, which once more crossed the stage, in a solemn manner, to the sound of triumphant music.

Through the succeeding darkness there came a monotonous throbbing and jarring that made the more sensitive among the audience shudder. The sound, the horrible beating sound, gradually developed into a savage and voluptuous music, made up of rhythmic discords. When the stage lightened a little, so that black figures could just be distinguished, flitting about

in the darkness, the rattling wail of the music became as furious as a tropical storm. The scene was a small clearing between the tree-trunks and tendrils of a swampy West African forest—one of those orgies to which from time to time frenzied negroes abandon themselves. A dim fire in the centre of the clearing threw strange streaks of light on the dancers around it, who were apparently naked ; on the foliage and tree-trunks and on the slimy ground ; but it illuminated nothing. The music alone, beating ever and ever more fiercely, suggested the weird depravity of the dance ; the dancers themselves remained always more than half invisible, black against blackness, a shadowed rhythm on the darkness, dancing wildly to a mysterious music, rising, falling, whirling, jarring. . . .

Fiercer grew the mad orgy—awakening a latent savagery, visions of unimagined lustfulness, in the audience, till many ached and twitched to join the negroes. Suddenly at the side of the stage appeared the Church and Empire Procession, rifles and crosses uplifted ; and the dancers, screaming, rushed to the back and there crouched down in a fearful heap.

For a moment, darkness : then the music changed to a fresh, cool gladness, while the missionaries and privates, the colporteurs and engineers, the red-cross nurses and sisters of medical missions, the clergymen and merchants, the dignitaries and officers, the field-marshal and bishop, filed past the desolate scene of the orgy, accompanied by regenerate negroes now clad respectably in white duck trousers.

In the next scene, the ship of Church and Empire appeared steaming along beneath the cliffs of a rocky island. The ship's company were assembled on deck. Bishop and field-marshal stood by an altar draped with the flag. 'Twas Sunday service aboard, and they were singing a hymn the words of which, to the audience,

seemed far distant and indistinguishable ; nearly overwhelmed by theplash of the sea. As the ship passed the island, the figure of Napoleon stood forward on a headland. And he doffed his hat.

With a darkening of the stage, the hymn died away. Once more the music became barbaric ; not voluptuously so this time, but ferociously. There was an unholy dry clacking in it, and, as it were, a reek of blood.

A cannibal feast in New Zealand was revealed. Tattooed Maoris, wrapped in blankets, were dancing and gesticulating greedily around a fire by the side of which was a white corpse partially bereft of its limbs. Garments of a missionary and of a European woman were flung over a hovel close by. One of the dancers wore the white woman's hat—a hat trimmed with blue corn-flowers which wobbled on his head. Another was kicking about in her petticoat. Nearly all of them brandished bones—thigh bones, arm bones, ribs. The skull they used between them like a football. Smears of blood added to the ghastliness of their tattooed faces.

Sometimes they gnawed at the bones.

"How horrible!" exclaimed some in the audience.

"It oughtn't to be allowed," said others, not without satisfaction in their voices.

There was a hoot from the gallery.

The cannibal dance grew greedier ; the music louder. Bones were thrown about. The white corpse was seized and dragged nearer the fire. Rude knives . . .

In a brilliant light at the side of the stage appeared the Church and Empire Procession, crosses and rifles uplifted. The cannibals flung down their bones and human joints ; sank to their knees, heads bowed down. Darkness fell.

When the procession recrossed the stage to the tune of a hymnal march, Maoris convoyed it. They were clothed more amply and in cleaner blankets ; not more

than one wife walked lovingly on the arm of each man ; the smears of blood were washed away from their faces, and they were eating fruits.

Four *tableaux vivants*, representing Indian scenes, followed cannibalism. In the first, there was much rejoicing and Eastern magnificence on account of a marriage between infants of high caste. In the second, the child wife was on her knees weeping with dishevelled hair beside the bed of the dying boy, her husband. The voices of wailing women mingled with the sound of the orchestra. Thirdly, came the burning of the boy-husband's body. Flames from the funeral pyre rose luridly heavenward, whilst the little wife in a transport of grief mourned and waisted beside it, not noticing the presence close by of the Church and Empire Procession, rifles and crosses uplifted. Just as the girl-wife, in her ecstasy, was about to perform the rite of suttee, to immolate herself on the pyre of her youthful husband, a missionary and a soldier sprang forward, and amid the plaudits of their comrades dragged her from the flames. The last of the four Indian *tableaux* represented the interior of a mission house. Representatives of the Church and Empire were ranged solemnly round the walls, singing a hymn and looking on with manifest approval while the beautiful girl widow of high caste, clothed in white, scrubbed the mission-house floor.

The limelight sun went down and rose again over the Garden of Aphrodite in ancient Alexandria. Somewhat unhistorically it was arranged that the pyramids and the Sphinx overlooked the luxuriant place, its palms and large-leaved plants, its fountains and its columns festooned with flowering creepers. Courtesans, long since dead and gone, walked in the garden with voluptuous step, their garments the tall thin draperies of the Greeks. To one among them, the most beautiful, was brought ceremoniously the philtre of love and death,

She drank : and to the long-drawn music of the orchestra, to its spiral convolutions of sweet sound, ever rising higher, ever becoming richer and faster, they danced the Dance of Love, which ends in death, in the Garden of Aphrodite, beneath the pyramids and the Sphinx. They danced till the Garden was a melody of twirling feet and floating filmy draperies and glimmering colours. She who had drunk of the philtre whirled in a sheen of light, adored by all the others ; the incarnation of a love and rapture beyond human reach, the symbol of love's uttermost frenzy ; until it seemed to the hard-breathing audience that the ballet could no longer go on without becoming really too indecent for the English stage.

Then it was that the Church and Empire Procession appeared, crosses and rifles uplifted ; and the ancient courtesans, stricken with a new shame, fled like ripples on a lake.

In the twilight of a moment the Garden of Aphrodite was razed to the ground. The pyramids and the Sphinx were left alone in the moonlit desert, save that a cross was erected between them, and Church and Empire passed into the distance, behind the Great Pyramid, singing a hymn of rejoicing.

By some optical contrivance, the Sphinx glanced at the cross, and—but without any movement—a look of fear flitted over its immobile face.

This made a great sensation.

Two minor scenes—the ship of Church and Empire saluted by the guns of Gibraltar, and its triumphant approach to the white cliffs of Dover—were introduced between the Dance of Love and what was described on the programme as :

*Grand Finale.*

*Under the Dome of St. Paul's.*

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN.

The nave of the national cathedral became gradually brighter, its huge square pillars and vasty spaces dimly lighted by the hanging candelabra, so that the chancel and high altar were invisible and only a glint of the coloured and golden mosaics could be seen. Already there was a great congregation in the nave. They were chanting processional hymns of triumph.

Slowly and with dignified step there filed in the bishop in a resplendent cope and mitre, his jewelled crosier borne aloft before him ; the field-marshall carrying his feathered hat and his baton ; officers of the army in full uniform and dignitaries of the Church in their canonicals ; clergymen in surplices and hoods, and merchants in silk-faced frock-coats ; red-cross nurses and sisters of medical missions in their best bonnets ; colporteurs with Bibles, and engineers with brand-new matlocks and spades ; soldiers with down-pointing rifles and missionaries with up-pointing crosses ; negroes in trousers and their women in what looked like night-shirts ; gentle cannibals ; the high-caste girl widow and her glad relatives, now Christians ; a bejewelled native prince willing to become the widow's second husband ; and the rescued courtesans of old Alexandria, clothed in blouses, skirts and sailor hats.

During the hush a man of the audience was heard say to his wife : " Foine ! Oin't it, M'rier ? "

The gates of the screen opened and the bishop passed within them to the sanctuary. The field-marshall stationed himself at a *prie-dieu* placed in the centre of the aisle, whilst the remainder of the Church and Empire Procession filed off to the chairs reserved for them underneath the dome.

As the congregation sang—

Forward, flock of Jesus,  
Salt of all the earth,  
Till each yearning purpose  
Spring to glorious birth.

Sick, they ask for healing,  
 Blind, they grope for day :  
 Pour upon the nations  
 Wisdom's loving ray.  
 Forward out of error,  
 Leave behind the night :  
 Forward through the darkness,  
 Forward into light !—

the chancel became illuminated. The audience perceived not the high altar and its reredos, but, in a circle of bright light, seated on the top of the Holy Mountain—  
 Alexander Trotman !

Then there were three cheers, thrice resounding.

The strains of the hymn changed abruptly to *God Save the King*.

Once the national anthem was played, twice it was played. It was begun again. Alec suddenly remembered his instructions. He stood erect on the Holy Mountain. He unfurled (with fumbling), and waved, the Union Jack.

Frantic enthusiasm possessed the audience. Hats, sticks, umbrellas, handkerchiefs, waved. Cheering and *God Save the King* arose one against the other—played vocal tug-o'-war.

But Alec—Alec was seen to totter, and to fall from top to bottom of the Holy Mountain. Those who had good places saw blood. Blood from the mouth.

The curtain was rung down amid the profoundest sensation.

Some said it was a judgment.

Others jeered

## XII

The last, the most impressive, scene of the Church and Empire Ballet took place behind the curtain.

Alec was propped up in a fainting condition against that simulacrum of the Holy Mountain down which

he had fallen. Ranged around him were the interior fittings of St. Paul's and the trees of the Garden of Aphrodite—all those properties, that is, which had not been optical delusions. On the outskirts of the group were the erstwhile courtesans and priests, craning their necks, pushing their painted faces forwards. The stage was brilliantly lighted. The audience could be heard departing from the theatre. A tone of wonderment was perceptible in the hubbub of their voices, through which shouts of newsboys outside penetrated in gusts of noise.

Nearest Alec were Sir Pushcott Bingley, the Half-penny Pressman, the manager of the Neapolitan, two doctors and a call-boy. After examining his bared chest with stethoscopes, they gave him a piece of ice to suck and told him to keep quite quiet. The ice froze his teeth. He made a wry face and began to revive.

"What is it?" Sir Pushcott Bingley asked.

"Has he complained of indigestion?" said one of the doctors.

"Nothing at all the matter with him. . . ."

"He told me," said the Halfpenny Pressman, "that he's had a stomach-ache, as he calls it, almost ever since he's been in London. His mother wrote . . ."

"H'm!" the doctor remarked. "That's it—lungs fairly sound—gastric ulcer, no doubt."

"Will he be right by to-morrow night's performance?" the manager of the music-hall inquired.

"My dear sir, he won't be right for a week, or yet a month. Gastric ulcer requires perfect rest and careful nursing, the best—if the cure is to be radical."

"But we've got a week's contract. . . ."

"Pardon me," Sir Pushcott interrupted.

"We've never had a better house than we had to-night. I'll give . . ."

"That cannot be helped. He must be taken to a hospital."

"Not to be thought of," said Sir Pushcott. "My house . . ."

"Or he ought to go home. Trowbury, isn't it?"

Alec attempted to speak. He even tried to get up, but was prevented by the doctor.

"Well, what is it, my boy?"

"I want to go home to mother," he whispered. "I don't like London."

"So you shall when you are a little better."

"Now," supplicated the Mountain Mover. "I won't stay!"

Then, being highly overwrought and too weak to struggle, he wept. The ice slipped out of his mouth. "I wish I'd never come. I wish I'd never gone near Ramshorn Hill." On their telling him to stay quiet, he made repeated efforts to roll over and get up, like an ungainly animal. His white face rocked from side to side.

"This must be stopped," said the doctor. "Can't we send for his people? He will bring on the haemorrhage again."

Sir Pushcott Bingley did not appear to favour the idea of receiving at Park Lane the Famous Grocer and his elegant wife. After a minute's meditation, he asked: "Would it not be possible to send him down to Wiltshire in a motor ambulance? They run as smoothly as beds, don't they?"

"Well—yes—that *would* be possible. But who is to go with him?"

"Go yourself and take a nurse, or two nurses if you like. I'll see to it, you understand. He *must* recover, you know."

"Oh, I think he will do that. He seems to be of a rather scrofulous tendency. Heredity. . . ."

"His father wrote to him and said they were going to make him Mayor of Trowbury," said the Halfpenny Pressman.

"Poor boy!" said the doctor.

"You had better go too," said Sir Pushcott to the Halfpenny Pressman. "I can manage. Let me know. No further need of me, I suppose? Good night, then."

They awaited the ambulance and the nurse. The major lights of the music-hall went out, until the group formed an illuminated spot, a dark-shadowed picture, framed by darkness.

### XIII

Thus did Alexander Trotman, after his triumph in London, return to his father's house and shop at Trowbury; lying on a swung spring-bed in a motor ambulance; watched by a doctor and a nurse; the victim of a shaky constitution and Sir Pushcott Bingley's table, of his father's youthful smartnesses and his own most moderate gluttony.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when the ambulance drove down Castle Street and stopped at the Famous Grocery. The Halfpenny Pressman rang the bell. Mrs. Trotman peeped out of an upper window, discreetly in order not to show her slip-bodice. "What is it? Do you want Mr. Trotman? Have you come from the police? My husband won't be on the bench to-day."

Seeing it was not the police, she slipped on a dressing-gown, tucked her hair inside the collar and went down to the front door.

They told her that Alec had been taken ill; showed her son to her lying pale on the spring-bed with a piece of ice in his mouth.

"Oh, Allie, Allie! What have they been doing to you?" she cried.

She ran indoors calling, "James, James ! Quick ! Come here !" She shouted to the servant to light a fire in Master Allie's bedroom, and, her voice breaking, ended in a screech.

Detaching the bed from its springs, they carried the Wonder Worker up to his own bedroom. Mr. Trotman appeared, not very fresh-looking at that time of day. But his coolness and dignity did not desert him.

" You are a doctor, I presume, sir ? " he said.

" Yes, I am."

" Sent by Sir Pushcott Bingley ? "

" Yes."

" And how is Sir Pushcott ? "

" Oh, doctor, doctor ! what is it, please ? " Mrs. Trotman exclaimed.

" Gastric ulcer—ulcerated stomach—haemorrhage . . ."

" Oh, I'm *so* thankful it's not that dreadful appendicitis ! Can he take Bovril ? Or would bread-and-milk be better ? "

BOOK III



# I

‘ANTIENT hostelries’ like the Blue Boar, in small towns like Trowbury, have many uses. First, of course, they are drinking-shops. Secondly, they are free clubs. Thirdly, they are informal places of appointment which seldom or never fail. If you have business with one of the leading tradesmen or minor professional men, you may go to his shop only to learn, probably, that he is out ; gone to his brother’s funeral, his aunt’s wedding, shooting, fishing, bathing, or somewhere whence he is expected every minute. But if you can recollect when he is accustomed to attend the Blue Boar bar, and look in at that hour, there you shall surely find him. Who can deny that business runs more sweetly to the tune of “What’s yours ?—Good health !—The same to you, sir !”?

On the Wednesday morning, despite all that had happened, Mr. Trotman entered the swing-doors at precisely his usual time.

“Well, I never, Mr. Trotman ! Whatever *have* you been up to ? You look . . . There ! HE-He-he-he-he ! Brandy and a small Schweppé : is that it ? ”

Mr. Trotman would not at once, however, look with Miss Sankey on the bright and bibulous side of things. He remained very serious indeed, and more faded in appearance than usual.

“I’ve had my son brought home very seriously ill.”

“Dear me !” Miss Sankey’s voice sank to a confidential whisper : “Dying, did you say ? ”

Mr. Trotman leaned over the counter. “The doctors

hardly know. Two of them there. Ulcerated stomach. Yes—brandy-and-soda, please."

"Ah, I had that, you know, when I was a young girl, and doesn't it serve you out, my word ! Poor boy !—Top o' the morning to you, Mr. Ganthorn ! How's you ? Eh ? I say, have you heard ? You tell him, Mr. Trotman. Dying ! Fancy ! After all he's done. . . . Moving mountains ! Poor boy ! And I know what it's like ; that I do. When everybody was talking about him everywhere. . . . Struck down ! Pride goes before a fall. Ay me ! filling glasses and a joke and a laugh isn't the worst life in the world when all's said and done. Shan't I be glad when Christmas comes !"

It pleased Mr. Ganthorn to look quizzical. He turned from the sympathetic Miss Sankey. "Is this true about your son, Trotman ? Heard this morning he was dying. Not so bad as that, is it ?"

The Mayor looked sorrowful, as if he feared the tragic worst ; as if so conspicuous an event might indeed happen to his family. He spoke in a deprecating manner : "I can't say. There's two doctors with him—Vere M'Lloyd and one Sir Pushcott sent down with the ambulance from London. Vere M'Lloyd tells my wife he's got hope, but it's pretty serious, I'm afraid."

Mr. Ganthorn sipped and meditated a moment or two. The Mayor did the same, most impressively. Then the former said with a great affectation of non-chalance : "How about what we were talking about the other day—what we arranged that night at my place, you know ?"

"Well, that's it. . . ."

"Come into the smoke-room. Drink up and have another.—Two more brandies and a split soda, please, Miss Cora, in the little smoking-room."

The two wiseacres retired to a very small rectangular room, the centre of which was occupied by a highly

polished brass-bound table, spotted with black burns, and bearing water jugs, match stands and ash trays, all with liquor advertisements upon them. At either end was an easy chair. Ranged along the walls, as closely as possible, were other wooden chairs of the straight-backed variety, with small wooden arms and commodious horsehair seats—chairs for fat men too stiff to lounge. That cramped little room is the Holy of Holies of the Blue Boar. There, especially on Sunday evenings after church-time, they love to sit, to listen to their voices, and sometimes to see each other through the murky air.

Mr. Trotman secured the easy chair under the window. To be near him, Mr. Ganthorn took the next straight-backed chair. They got up and closed the window, shutting out a scent of flowers. They settled down again....

When Miss Sankey took in the drinks, she heard Mr. Ganthorn saying, "Well, you see, it's like this : if he can't be mayor after you, it's the Liberals' turn, and one of their men will have to go in ; and as there'll probably be a general election pretty soon, it'll be as well to have a Conservative mayor if we can. With a Conservative mayor, Conservative affairs go better. I don't mean to say the mayor influences the election, and yet he does, in *little* ways, you understand ; and it's the little ways that count when there's a fight for it."

As they strolled across the hall, on their way out of the hotel, Miss Sankey was able to overhear a little more.

"I hope it won't turn out so serious after all," Mr. Ganthorn was saying.

"We shall hear when Sir Pushcott's specialist gets down later in the day. If anybody can pull him through, Sir Pushcott Bingley's physician will. Very kind of him. . . ."

"Well, good morning. About the other matter—his being mayor—I think *I* can work *that*."

## II

There is happily no need to inquire how far the rapid improvement in Mr. Trotman's spirits was due to the Blue Boar bar, to his confabulation with Mr. Ganthorn, to the gentle exercise of trotting about Trowbury, or to the very pleasant things he saw and heard. At all events, the world assumed for him a gayer tint. Mild martyrdom plus pity is a subtle mixture, a moral absinthe. The certain knowledge that his only son—a young man just making such a mark—was dangerously ill, became glossed over by Mr. Trotman's being, as at the commencement of his mayoralty, a centre of public attention.

Such attention, too !

There was the *Halfpenny Press* with its five million readers. A public of five thousand thousand had its compound eye upon the house of Trotman. It was a little nebulous, that ; a cloud of witnesses too cloudy ; but it made Mr. Trotman feel his own importance in the universe. And, to come nearer home, men and women whom he did not know (as civic head of Trowbury he considered himself acquainted with everybody worth knowing) asked him how his son did, and all about the illness, in a manner so kindly that he appropriated the kindness for himself. All treated him as one overwhelmed by conquering grief. A commercial traveller, no particular friend of his, rather the reverse indeed, asked him to have a 'reviver.' Another man suggested a pick-me-up, and yet another was ready to broach a last dozen of the best tonic port in Trowbury's cellars. Already fortified, as aforesaid, Mr. Trotman withstood the temptation, and felt all the better for that too. The Rev. Mr. Marteene, a hot and outspoken opponent of grocers' licences, whom he happened to meet in the Market Square,

asked if the invalid might be visited and suggested prayers for recovery in all the churches. He spoke so nicely, so religiously, that a starting tear made Mr. Trotman wink. What the stricken father said about the medical details of the case would have furnished forth a writer of patent medicine advertisements, from which in fact his knowledge of the pathology and therapeutics of the stomach was mainly derived. Moving the Holy Mountain, he quite agreed, might so have exhausted the poor boy's vital forces that his digestive organs—never, alas! very strong — fell an easy victim to disease.

Hitherto, he had regarded Alec's multifarious ailments as a sort of pastime indulged in by Mrs. Trotman. Now he was almost anxious to abdicate his place as head of the household ; willing to await permission to be taken to the sick-room, and to obey orders while there. It satisfied his conception of correct behaviour under such circumstances.

Alec lay flat with only one of Mrs. Trotman's best hemstitched pillows beneath his tired head. The tranquil sunshine of a late summer's afternoon made him look simply wan and peaceful, without accentuating the truly deplorable state of his always mediocre complexion. His weakness could be judged by the way his eyes, without movement of the head, followed the zigzag flight of a bee which buzzed up and down the window until it found an opening (strongly opposed by Mrs. Trotman as likely to give the boy his death of cold, but insisted upon by the nurse), and flew out.

The medicated odour of the room at once put Mr. Trotman in the frame of mind for visitation of the sick. Probably the first time since Alec's babyhood, he was preparing to treat his offspring with respect. It brought a sense of pathos, even to him, to look down at this young man, who had been reared with so much difficulty,

now struck down by little ulcers at the most, the only, brilliant period of his life.

Alec, in reality, however, was happier and more comfortable than he had been for some time. Illness, to which his mother had accustomed him, was much less worrying than the Modern Miracle ; than Sir Pushcott Bingley, London, the *Halfpenny Press*, and all the complications that had arisen out of them. Now he was at rest. Sufficient for the day was the kindness and pain thereof. Being ill, he was content to wait patiently on the future. If the divine, the comfortable, Julia floated into his weary mind, she came accompanied by no call to immediate action.

Mr. Trotman advanced to the bedside on tiptoe.

"Well, my boy, how is it now ? "

Alec smiled dimly. "All right."

"You must hurry up and get better. We are going to make you mayor, perhaps."

"      !"

"You'll soon be well. Sir Pushcott's own consulting physician 'll soon put you right. We must write and thank Sir Pushcott."

Alec remained silent, inert, pitiful.

Other proper things to say slipped Mr. Trotman's mind. One cannot bully a son into conversation and filial respect when he is incontestably very ill ; not, that is, if the son is surrounded by protectors in the shapes of doctors, nurses, and a mother. Mr. Trotman had never practised kind cajolery with his son. He didn't know how. So he retired helpless.

The *Halfpenny Press*, which Mr. Trotman did not fail to purchase, excited itself to great eloquence in its best style. The Church and Empire Ballet was described vividly and without impropriety ; the public consternation ; the scene behind the scenes, which reminded the *Hal'penny Press* of nothing so much as

Nelson dying in the cockpit of the *Victory*; the journey of the motor ambulance with its acetylene lamps and ‘the fraughted souls within her,’ across the dark country to the Mountain Mover’s beloved native town; and finally the pathetic reception by alarmed awakened parents. The journey was said to be a striking instance of the modern coalition between the mechanic and the medical sciences. The latest resources of civilisation were ready and willing to lend their aid to the resuscitator of the Age of Miracles. Readers were referred to another page to an article by a high authority on motor ambulances. All England, said the morning’s leader, all the Empire, half the world, would be watching around the bed of sickness at Trowbury with anxiety, and with prayer to the Almighty Dispenser of health and disease. In fine—to strip away much verbiage—the young man, recognising that he had performed the miracle of the twentieth century only by kind permission of Almighty God, did desire, as a thank-offering, that the Church should receive the earthly benefits of what he had accomplished. But how? There were obstacles unconquerable except by united national action. . . .

Mr. Trotman could not refrain from ejaculating: “Did he? by Jove!”

The *Evening Press*, in addition to a mincemeat of the morning’s news, contained a bulletin (copyright) of the sufferer’s progress, or non-progress; a diagrammatic analysis of the motor ambulance’s speed; a popular article on the stomach with six reasons for the increase in dyspepsia; and a photograph of the stricken mother which Mrs. Trotman declared to be an old one, totally unlike, an impudence and a libel.—But how nice of them to put it there! how enterprising of Sir Pushcott!

The *Evening Press* also mentioned casually a suggestion ‘emanating from an exalted quarter,’ that the

Holy Mountain might, through the agency of the Church, be used as a religious centre, to tighten the Christian bonds of Empire.

And the gist of Mr. Trotman's meditations on all this amounted to, "Where do *I* come in?"

At the Blue Boar in the early evening he succeeded in drawing into conversation a solicitor who, though of course a professional man while Mr. Trotman was trade, condescended sometimes to take a glass with him. To the solicitor as a man of the world he outlined the events of the past fortnight in the shadowy secretive manner of conferring an illicit favour, in the guise of a man-to-man confidence made to a solicitor whose personal opinion was valuable but whose professional opinion was in no wise explicitly asked. In return for such touching confidence, Mr. Trotman was informed that *if* such and such a thing were *so*, and *if* other things were *otherwise*, the common sense, and the legal, conclusion could only be *this*; but *if* sundry things had been *thus*, then the result at law would be *that*. What Mr. Trotman could not determine was whether such and such things were *so*, other things *otherwise*, and sundry things *thus*. The *ifs* tormented him; the solicitor's bill when it came in at the end of the year made him bounce:

*To Conversation with Yourself at the Blue Boar Hotel, and Advice, say, Ten shillings and six-pence. 10/6.*

Mr. Trotman said that all lawyers were rogues and scoundrels who made fortunes by transacting affairs the greater part of which any good business man (like himself) could do equally as well, or better.

## III

Next day, Sir Pushcott Bingley's consulting physician arrived in Trowbury. Mr. Trotman had a fleeting notion that the Mayor and Corporation ought to meet him at the station. Mrs. Trotman nearly fluttered her heart out with proud trepidation, and became faint with suspense. The three doctors mauled the patient ; poked, prodded and tapped him ; questioned the nurse in slow nonchalant tones ; and then they went to the drawing-room where Mrs. Trotman, in her bazaar-opening, prize-giving dress, was awaiting them.

"Do you think, Dr. Blenkhowe . . ." the stricken mother began.

"Quite satisfactory, quite satisfactory, Mrs.—ah—Trotman," said the great physician. "It appears to me that the diagnosis of Dr. Garth and Dr. M'Lloyd is quite correct in every respect—absolutely."

He made a hearty meal off the highly deleterious refreshments (see *Traditional Diet*, by J. B. Y. Blenkhowe, M.D., etc. etc.) provided by Mrs. Trotman, and talked to the other two doctors about the celebrated air of Trowbury and the desirability of polluting the Downs with a sanatorium for tuberculous ladies.

Mrs. Trotman did think that he might have said more about Alexander's stomach.

When he was on the point of going, however, Dr. Blenkhowe addressed Mrs. Trotman once more. "It appears to me, Mrs.—ah—Trotman," he said, "that the treatment of Dr. M'Lloyd and Dr. Garth leaves nothing to be desired—nothing."

In the world's eye, Alexander Trotman's stomach slowly healed ; and Dr. Blenkhowe, by means of his success in this case, so thoroughly advertised in the *Halfpenny Press*, was enabled to give up his practice,

to devote himself exclusively to the stomach-aches of a few extraordinarily wealthy patients, and to write works of great popularity but doubtful literary merit.

Mr. Trotman; no longer young, was moved by his son's danger to meditate sometimes on death. With men of his practical stamp, to think on death is to fear it. The idea of profit and loss he could not dissociate from it. The advantages of investment in virtue, bearing interest beyond the grave, appealed to him. He felt, too, that it would be nice to do good, as he phrased it to himself. He made up his mind to do something good, and very naturally chose his son as a convenient object on which to practise good intentions. He would not himself have been allowed to tend Alec. The arrangement was that the professional nurse watched him through the night and his mother during the day. Mrs. Trotman, therefore, could obtain no outdoor exercise. So, when Alec no longer required quite such skilled and constant attention, Mr. Trotman announced that he would sit in the room while his wife and the nurse took a constitutional together. After some opposition, he got his way. He lighted a mild cigar, hoped Alec did not mind the smoke, and stationed himself beside the bed.

Father and son—pretty picture !

Whilst the blue smoke from Mr. Trotman's cigar-end and the white smoke from his mouth curled fantastically about in the still, sunshiny air of the room, he tried to begin a pleasant chat with his son. But Alec did not want to talk to his father any more than before. Neither Sir Pushcott Bingley's town mansion and the appurtenances thereof, nor the future and the money to be made out of it, could lure him into intelligent conversation. He answered direct questions briefly and aloofly ; that was all. And Mr. Trotman had anticipated a nice little talk, a little sympathy from his son for his own virtuous feelings. How hard it is to commence virtue !

Later in the day, as soon as he was released indeed, Mr. Trotman mentioned the matter to Miss Sankey.

"The boy's got no spirits at all ; no enterprise, no go. I can't think where he gets it from. Not from me. In twenty-five years I've built up the business with the largest turnover in Trowbury, except this place perhaps. He's been too much at his mother's apron-strings, but she *will* have it. Delicate. . . . One of her brothers is a fair waster ! "

"He never comes in here," remarked Miss Sankey, as if to join the ranks of the Blue Bores was to show oneself decisively a man of enterprise.

"No," Mr. Trotman replied gravely. "My son does not frequent public bars."

"Ah!" said Miss Sankey with her mouth full. "Tisn't always the most artful that's the most happy. Have a chocolate ? A nice young man of mine gave me a whole two-pound box this morning, and I didn't fish for them either like I did when you didn't give me any after all. *He* said I had a cheery voice. Go on ! take a handful."

For the second time that day Mr. Trotman felt himself rebuffed ; confined within the measure of other people's stupidity.

Sick people are commonly supposed to lie by, to think of their sins and to repent. The testimony of observers unbiassed by grief indicates rather that in the majority of cases an invalid does no such thing, because weakness brings procrastination in its train, and death steals away the power of thought before it is aware of its own decline. Nevertheless, it does more frequently happen that young people, recovering slowly from an illness, collect themselves together, as it were. They break through their former easy subjection to the wills of others. They take into their hands the tillers of their own boats, and by skill, not strength, they steer

them. In their weakness they are more decisive than in their power. Knowing at last what they want, they take steps to get it.

So with Alec. Up to the time of his illness he drifted merely ; a piece of flotsam on the currents stirred up by his neighbours. He was a grown-up schoolboy whose attempt to write an article showed the aimless befuddle-  
ment of his wits ; a fool. Now, while his mother watched over him, trembling for his weakness, he developed, by a sort of inward communion, a dull apprehension of the aimlessness of his life, of the lack in it of any definite hopes, and also sufficient initiative to bend his mother to his newly aroused will. He became a man ; not much of a man ; but a man that's a man for a' that !

He determined to see his Julia.

One morning, therefore, while his mother was fussing about the room, he said : " I want to see Julia Jepp."

" Who ? Julia Jepp ! . . . "

" Miss Jepp at Clinch's."

" You must lie quiet and get better, my dear," said his mother, with some asperity in her voice.

Alec bothered no more about it then, but next morning he asked simply : " When's Miss Jepp coming ? "

" Alec ! Your father would never give his consent."

" Then don't ask him."

Again the subject dropped, and again Mrs. Trotman did nothing but decide inwardly that it was absurd and out of the question—naughty of Alec. It happened, however, that Dr. Vere M'Lloyd, concluding the ulcers healed, put Alec on a less restricted diet—a little sole, a little *good* wine (he knew what the Mayor's wines were like), and a little custard. Alec was told, moreover, to brighten up. He was to have some unfatiguing diversion and enjoy himself. Games, some reading, visitors. . . .

"I should like to have some visitors," said the patient.

"So you shall, my boy, by all means. Let him see people he likes to see, Mrs. Trotman, if it doesn't fatigues him or excite him too much."

While the doctor was being shown downstairs with the usual ceremony, he remarked : "Everything to brighten him up, Mrs. Trotman. He seems as if he wants more object in life. With care, he ought to make a steady recovery ; but, you understand, there must be no relapse."

"But . . ."

"Let him do anything he wants to, in reason. Good morning, Mrs. Trotman. Beautiful day."

On returning to the sick-room Mrs. Trotman found her son visibly brighter.

"Now you'll send for Miss Jepp. I want to see her more than anybody else."

"Your father . . ."

"Haven't *you* ever done anything when father was out ? "

Mrs. Trotman escaped. But when she next appeared, bearing food, Alec asked, "Well ? Have you done it ? You say you want to make me better, and you don't do what the doctor says."

"All right, dear. I'll send. Only I hope your father won't get to know."

"Never mind him ! Do it first and see what he says afterwards. He can't kill you for it, and he won't kill me 'cause I'm profitable."

"But he'll talk."

"So he will anyhow."

Mrs. Trotman was relieved—almost jubilant—when she was able to tell her son : "I've sent round to Clinch's for Miss Jepp, and she says she can't come."

"Give me some paper and an envelope and a pencil, please."

He thereupon wrote with all a lover's artfulness :

" DEAR JULIA,

" You aren't going to chuck me now I'm ill, are you ?

" Your affectionate Friend,

" ALEXANDER TROTMAN."

" Send that," said the invalid. " That'll fetch her."

Mrs. Trotman couldn't see the writing through the envelope. She sent the note at once.

#### IV

It was not till next morning that Alec received a small pink strongly scented envelope sealed with a dab of bright blue wax. Inside it he found : " Early closing. Coming half-past two. Haste. J. J."

And just after half-past two, Alec, whose ears had become preternaturally sharp, heard double footsteps coming up the stairs. He raised himself slightly in bed, smoothed the coverlet, touched the bedclothes round him. His mother was talking very fast. " Yes, he's better now, thank God ; but we didn't know what would happen at first, or for some days." People of the Trotman stamp mention God to their foes in order that God may appear to be on their side.

As the last rays of sunset glide into a room, seeming to warm it and to fill it with a half-earthly radiance, so did the yellow girl from Clinch's rustle into the sick-room in the wake of Mrs. Trotman, and warm it and brighten it for Alec. " He's looking better now, not quite so pale," Mrs. Trotman was saying nervously, " and the doctor has ordered him a little fish."

She fiddled with the blind. " It's a little glaring, this room, but very cheerful, is it not ? "

"Mother," said Alec, "hadn't you better go and see where father is?"

Mrs. Trotman stopped like a talking-machine run down. With a glance behind her, she went.

"Julie. . . ."

"Sh! you must keep quiet, or I shall have to go."

"They're always saying 'Sh!' Tell me some news. How've you been getting on?"

"Oh, *I'm* all right."

"Well, everybody? How's Miss Starkey. *She* wasn't up to much, was she?"

"Miss Starkey is out at nurse's—Mrs. Parfitt's. I think she's better, but . . . I generally go out to tea with her on Sunday. Only it won't do to let people know I'm chummy with her still. You see . . . Now, keep quiet. You mustn't get excited, or else you'll be bad again, like you were in London. Miss Starkey's all right."

"D'you know, Julie," said Alec in an uncommonly grown-up manner for him, "I've almost forgotten about London lying here. It's like a sort of dream, and I often say to myself, 'Did I really go to London?' and all that. Have you been to see where Ramshorn Hill went from? My father says they ought to start a quarry company there. Julie, do you remember what we said up there?" Alec craned forward on his pillow.

"I was so frightened. Don't let's talk about it."

"But you remember what nurse said?"

Julie began chattering unintelligibly to gain time. Alec raised himself in bed, hanging on her mixed-up words as an innocent man, almost talked into guiltiness by the prosecution, hangs on the foreman of the jury's. He plucked at the sheet—a pitiful object of weakness and suppressed excitement.

Julia tried to calm him. But he besought her: "You do remember, don't you? You *must* remember, Julie?"

"Sh, sh ! You mustn't, Alec. You'll make yourself ill."

"There ! you called me 'Alec.' Do it again. We *will* be engaged, won't we, Julie ? "

"No, no ! I didn't mean that."

"But you did ! We were. Nurse thought we were."

"You *must* keep quiet, Mr. Trotman."

"Why's everybody against me ? They always sit on me—everybody ! They always have. And now you're doing it too."

"You mustn't take it that way. You're going to be rich and not have to work, and have motor cars. Think of poor Edie Starkey with nobody belonging to her. I'm almost keeping her, but you mustn't tell anybody, because . . . Well, I don't want it to be known."

"I don't care about Edie Starkey. I don't want to get better—not if we're not going to be engaged. Julie, I've got better for you. I've thought about it here. . . ."

"No ! I can't ever marry you. I really can't. But I'll be friends. We will be friends, won't we ? "

This was exceedingly commonplace ; almost fictional if it had been done more stylishly. But there were harried and suppressed emotions beneath it all. Miss Julia Jepp was touching that part of life not to be found in a country Emporium except through the medium of fiction. Therefore, searched and worried to her inmost being, she talked about continuing friends with Alec. The lovely Lady Verbena Gwalter talked so, at first, to the noble navvy, in *Love's High Jump*.

Alec, unlike that genteel and herculean navvy, cried out "Julie !" in a tone of despair that Julie did not get out of her ears for some time. And he showed signs of fainting.

In fact, he did faint for a minute or two.

Then was Miss Jepp in a situation familiar to her, and at her best. She rushed to the washhandstand,

wrung out the towel in cold water and applied it to Alec's forehead. She opened the windows wide ; searched the mantelpiece, found a bottle of eau de Cologne, and sprinkled it over a handkerchief, which she substituted for the wet towel. Tipping out some more of the scent upon her own handkerchief, a folded delicate thing for visiting, she placed it to his nose. On his remaining inert, she took fright and rang the bell.

Whereupon he revived.

Mrs. Trotman appearing, found her son's face half hidden under handkerchiefs, and the room pungent with eau de Cologne.

" What have you done ? " she demanded

" He was a bit faint."

" And look at the windows ! "

" I let some fresh air in. Give him a little brandy."

" No. The doctor hasn't said . . ."

" Yes. Just a little. Where is it ? "

Like rapier-play went the words :

" He's my son ! "

" He's my young man ! "

" No, he isn't ! "

" Yes, he is ! "

" You'd better go ! "

" I shan't ! "

" You shall ! "

" I will ! "

" What's this ? " asked Mr. Trotman, who had just come up, in his sepulchral tones. " Miss Jepp ! Why's she here. I won't . . ."

" Be quiet, father," said Alec from the bed.

And, strange to say, Mr. Trotman obeyed his son.

" Good-bye, so long, Julie."

" Good-bye."

" Will you ? "

"We'll see."

Julia was left to find her own way downstairs and out of the house. She was hot for vengeance. So, too, were the Mayor and Mayoress. Their faces all showed it—faces incongruous in the midst of the workaday world. But it is to be recollected that the affair was both serious and heart-moving to the comical people concerned in it.

## V

Alec recovered rapidly from the excitement of Miss Jepp's visit, which indeed woke him up a little from his state of coddled apathy and in so doing hastened his convalescence. Mr. and Mrs. Trotman recovered less quickly, under the compulsion of events, so to speak. They—Mrs. Trotman especially—would have liked to get Julia Jepp dismissed from the Emporium, much as Miss Starkey had been flung out of the Famous Grocery Establishment. That, however, could not be done, since she was valuable to the Emporium, in that her taste (in other people's dress) attracted the custom of ladies from the country as well as of tradesmen's wives and faithful aspiring gullible servant girls. She gave the place a tone, and with that a profit which Mr. Clinch's expensive gross habits could ill have done without. And Mrs. Clinch was fond of her.

Therefore she stayed; though had the Blue Bores known that an unfortunate girl in trouble was mainly supported by her charity, out of her earnings and savings, they would have felt it necessary, for the sake of respectability, to procure her discharge, and would have spent many hours deeply regretting such a scandal.

Other matters, too, drew off Mr. and Mrs. Trotman's anger. The Mayor had an appointment with the vicar

to discuss a reconstruction of the Coal and Blanket Club, of which Mrs. Trotman was *ex-officio* president. The vicar was of opinion that too large a proportion of the funds had been applied towards the committee's bazaar expenses, and also that some starving families had been receiving the club's warmth without deserving it as much, for instance, as the vicar might have done had he been destitute. He spoke his mind, and as a small attention after doing so, he gave Mr. Trotman a marked copy of that week's *Anglican Churchman*, with which Mr. Trotman straightway hastened home to his son.

"What do you think of this, my boy, from the *Anglican Churchman*?" said the happy father :

"We hear, on good authority, that the Church is likely to reap at least some advantage from the miraculous removal of Ramshorn Hill from the neighbourhood of Trowbury, in Wiltshire, to that of the metropolitan suburb of Acton. Nothing could be more appropriate, or more in accordance with Divine Command. By the Church it was moved. To the Church (D.V.) it will come. For we need not to remind our readers that Mr. Alexander Trotman is a convinced and active, though not a communicating, Anglican. We trust, however, that the terms of the gift—if gift it is to be—will be clearly laid down at the outset. The Church has had enough of half measures, has suffered enough at the hands of non-sectarians and infidels. *How long, O Lord, how long!* Divine service demands free gifts. We can have nothing to do with undenominational religion. We have no doubt but our dissenting friends would be ready to help us and to make the so-called Holy Mountain a conspicuous centre of propaganda directed against the righteous union of Church and State. *Verbum satis sapienti!* "

"That sounds as if we shan't have much to do with it. . . ."

"Oh," said Alec.

"But Sir Pushcott 'll give 'em what for."

"Yes."

Mrs. Trotman entered the sick-room with a telegram in her hand. "Sir Pushcott Bingley's coming down to-morrow! We simply can't ask him to stay here.—D'you hear, Alec, Sir Pushcott's coming!"

"Let 'em all come," replied the invalid wearily.

On looking into the *Halfpenny Press* next day Mr. Trotman was astonished to find that a newspaper which had tried often to scare the nation with articles on alcoholic degeneration of the British imperial race, had now displaced the gracious doings of the Royal Family, the little war in the Himalayas, the Anglo-Indian crisis and even the Holy Mountain, by several columns in support of the falling Conservative ministry—by a leading article on premature temperance legislation and the sacred British rights of individual liberty.

"Good again!" remarked Mr. Trotman, thinking of his grocer's licence.

Then he recollect ed that there was no knowing if the family of Trotman would need to be in trade much longer. A country house appeared to his mind's eye—pheasant coverts, motor cars, obsequious villagers, himself a sportsman, a seat in Parliament, a title, Sir James Trotman, Lord Trowbury. . . .

For James Trotman had his day-dreams as well as his liver-nightmares.

## VI

"Sir Pushcott's coming!" What excitement in the Famous Grocery Establishment! Mrs. Trotman very nearly forgot for a moment her son's internal arrangements.

Sir Pushcott Bingley was exceedingly sorry not to be able to accept Mrs. Trotman's kind hospitality. She would understand, would she not? It was—ah—necessary for him to be near his motor, which was in the Blue Boar garage. A new chauffeur. . . . A public life had to be lived in public places. He had, in fact, ordered dinner at the Blue Boar by telegram. But if Mrs. Trotman would allow him, he would look in after dinner. . . .

Charming man!

"He might have asked you to dinner with him at the Blue Boar," said Mrs. Trotman to her husband, nevertheless.

"Public men like to be by themselves sometimes. Perhaps he'll dictate to his secretary while he's at dinner," replied 'Mendment Trotman, for the sake of amending what he otherwise completely agreed with.

Sir Pushcott Bingley was forgiven after supper. He was jubilant, merry, jolly; most condescending. He told them exalted secrets.

"The curse of the British Empire," he said, holding up to the light a glass of the Famous Grocer's port wine and replacing it on the table somewhat decidedly, "is, as you say, a lack of enterprise—an inability to take the tide at the flood. I am sorry Alexander is not well enough to join our conclave: you must inform him gradually, Mrs. Trotman, as his strength warrants. But you must please understand fully that what I am saying must not leak out—not a word ('Not a word!' echoed Mr. Trotman)—or all our efforts will be quite fruitless, and instead of making money, we shall certainly lose it."

"D'you hear, Lilian," said Mr. Trotman.

"You'd better listen to Sir Pushcott too," retorted Mrs. Trotman with a touch of acerbity.

"I am sure I can trust you to preserve our interests—

your own interests—all our interests," was Sir Pushcott's brilliantly tactful stroke.

After journalistic strife in London he liked to have these provincial fools, as he thought them, hanging on speeches of his. Possibly to let rip, more than it usually behoved him to do in London, made him feel the equal of the extremely clever writers whom he employed.

"Well," he went on, "as I was saying, the Gods fought for us. I should never have been able to obtain the lease of the Holy Mountain if the situation, political and religious, had not been what it is. You see, the Conservative Government will have to go to the country very shortly, and if I were to print everything I could print, it's fairly certain that they would not return to power for a year or two. The election will really turn on the temperance question, and there is nothing like temperance, unless it's education, for pandering to the desire of every virtuous man and every busybody to be his brother's keeper. To clap your opponent into legal fetters is one of the easiest and pleasantest ways of doing good—much easier and pleasanter than loving your neighbour as yourself and less costly than sending out missionaries to savages who don't want them. Missions, as you know, are mainly kept up by old ladies who, if they saw Mary Magdalene coming, would fly into the next street and then send a policeman after her to find out whether she had come honestly by her alabaster box of precious ointment. Forcing Christianity on niggers and education on the poor are two of the easiest ways of running up one's credit account in heaven ; and besides, since it makes both of them more profitable, it also runs up one's credit account on earth. Temperance legislation is the best dodge of all. The reformer who gets drunk every evening of his life, but makes a point, for his liver's sake, of

drinking nothing but salts in the morning, always wishes to close the public-houses till midday."

"We certainly ought to be more temperate, as a nation," Mr. Trotman remarked.

"Precisely," said Sir Pushcott. "Who disputes it? But I have given you the main reason why so-called temperance reform is a practicable plank in the Liberal platform, and seduces so many Conservatives from the broad lines of party action. The *Halfpenny Press* has always advocated retrenchment and reform on imperial lines; efficiency, regeneration, and all that; together with a modicum of temperance—a good deal of it, in fact, lately;—for it would never have done for the opinion of the country to leave the *Halfpenny Press* behind. We have to go with it; and we find that a little temperance has a distinctly beneficial effect on our circulation.

"One of the cabinet ministers said to me a short time ago: 'You know, Bingley, the Conservative party will go to the dogs if this teetotal foolery can't be stopped, and the electorate roused up to value its damn liberties.'

"Well, the Government are of opinion that if once the average man can be given a sense of his inalienable right to get drunk if he wants to, and be made to see what these pin-prick temperance tactics are bound to end in, then he will rouse up and completely overwhelm the reformers, and the Liberal-Labour party with them. It is the Conservatives' last chance; they've run up taxation so; and I promised we'd help them if they would lease the Holy Mountain, which is Crown land, to your son—to us, that is. Of course they demurred; said the Liberals would scent jobbery and make party capital out of it. So I pointed out that our unequivocal support was their last chance of staying in office, and that the wind might easily be taken out of the Liberal sails by our undertaking to sublet the Mountain to

the Church for religious purposes. Also we—your son and myself that is—offered to bear the brunt of any legal proceedings instituted by the Acton landlords whose property has been obliterated by the hill. In point of fact, they are men in a smallish way, for the hill luckily fell clear of the Goldsmiths' Company's estate ; and they have not enough money to guarantee their legal costs, let alone bring their cases to a successful conclusion. Capital is the tenth point of the law."

" But," asked Mrs. Trotman, who came of dissenting stock, though she was usually ashamed to say so, " why should the Church have it all ? The Church is not the only religion."

" Yes ? " added her husband.

" There are two very excellent practical reasons. The Church is the official State religion. Again, you'll find that the Church will be compelled to let other sects participate, and it is always best to let the sectarians fight out their own battles. And lastly, I am not so sure that the Church will be very greatly the gainer, for we shall not sublet the Holy Mountain to them for nothing, and in these days of fierce religious competition, they can no doubt be made to bid pretty high if they are properly managed. In any case, the Holy Mountain will be leased to your son at a nominal rent for twenty-one years on the understanding that he sublets it to the Church—for how long not stated. As expressed in our agreement, I shall provide the capital. We stand to make money, I think."

" Much ? " Mr. Trotman asked.

" Impossible to say exactly how much at the present moment. If we can keep the Acton landowners quiet and prevent them from forming a syndicate, as I think we shall. . . . I daresay you saw this morning that the *Halfpenny Press* has taken up its new policy. We are no longer Social Reformers, as they call themselves,

but Benevolent Individualists—let 'em reform themselves and devil take the hindmost ! As he always has done ! ”

“ But I wonder you aren't ashamed to be—like a turncoat,” said Mrs. Trotman, who was still smarting from some of the baronet's remarks, notably those on missions and charitable ladies, both of which entered considerably into her schemes for social success. “ People,” she added, using an underbred woman's favourite indefinitely definite noun, “ are generally ashamed of being inconsistent.”

“ Of being detected,” replied Sir Pushcott Bingley. “ Besides, Mrs. Trotman, it is not within the province of the Press to be ashamed.”

“ How clever you are, Sir Pushcott ! ”

“ What d'you think the Church will do ? ” inquired Mr. Trotman.

“ I really don't know. And what does it matter ? Talk, I suppose. What the Church misses is its ancient power of excommunication. Nobody takes any notice of its thunders nowadays. It is like an old lady whose complaints are received with the forbearance due to her senility, and whose charities have come to be regarded as rights. Even its power of social ostracism has passed to those who make more vigorous use of it—the nonconformists, I mean. They are our modern priest-craftsmen, even though their priests may be merely retired tradesmen, made into preachers in order to flatter their money out of them and to keep them faithful when social considerations would naturally urge them towards the Church.”

“ But that is very serious, very,” remarked Mr. Trotman.

“ Oh no ! not at all, when you know how to take advantage of it. Let church and chapel exhaust their ammunition on one another ; not on us. The

Archbishop of All the Empire, whose creation I brought about, is the only man to be feared ; but even he is more or less helpless to do much but talk, because his consecration is unpopular among the old-fashioned Church-people who, after all, hold the ecclesiastical purse-strings.”

The Director of the *Halfpenny Press* did not know, of course, that Mrs. Trotman’s revered, respected and feared parent had been an eloquent deacon of the straitest sect of nonconformists ; had frightened one anæmic girl into religious mania and had laid several foundation stones.

“ Look at this, sir,” said Mr. Trotman, producing his copy of the *Anglican Churchman*.

Sir Pushcott glanced down it. “ Yes. Very good. It was arranged for by me. You see, they are already beginning to look the gift-horse in the mouth, and to lay down conditions of acceptance which no one will stop to listen to. Excellent people—fatuous, no doubt. If they only knew how they play into other people’s hands. . . . They don’t possess the diplomacy of cockroaches, which at least lie hidden till their hosts are gone to bed.”

“ We have a lot of cockroaches in the kitchen,” said Mrs. Trotman. “ I believe they come from the shop.”

“ Nonsense ! ” said her husband. He roused himself in his chair, tapped the ash off his cigar, and, with a great semblance of import, in his most sepulchral voice, spoke thus :

“ We have been diplomatic here too.”

Then he watched for an effect.

“ We are going to make him Mayor of Trowbury if he’s well enough.”

“ Excellent ! ”

“ There’s rather a deadlock at present. We have a Conservative and a Liberal mayor turn and turn about,

but it's the Liberals' turn next, and they have nobody that wants to take office, and they don't want a Conservative to have it. So me and Mr. Ganthorn, a great friend of mine, have dropped a word here and a word there, you understand. . . ."

"Perfectly."

"And it's about settled that my son is to be next mayor. You see, he hasn't got any politics, except mine ; always Tories, my family ; and he hasn't helped the party like I have. It's thought that a well-known mayor may bring well-to-do residents to the town. The present member, Delaine Jenkyns, you know, told me that I had more to do with his getting in than any other man."

"He told Mr. Clinch that, too," Mrs. Trotman interrupted.

"No, he didn't!"

"Yes, he did! You *know* he did. You said if he did it again you'd vote Liberal."

"Well," said Sir Pushcott, with the intention of being tactful, "these country mayors are of considerable importance in their own parish. It may help us. . . ."

"My husband is the present mayor," said Mrs. Trotman severely.

"Oh! I congratulate you. I had forgotten that of course. Father and son! Excellent. A very responsible mayor he makes, I have no doubt, Mrs. Trotman. The duties are onerous, I believe. I must say *Good night*. Son following his father—a family title. I have to thank you for your kind hospitality, Mrs. Trotman. Most kind. Tell your son he must hurry up and get quite well. I'll call in and see him to-morrow, if I may. Good night."

With most gracious handshakes, Sir Pushcott Bingley took his leave.

But was he such a charming man after all? Had it

not been for her beloved son's interests, Mrs. Trotman would have unsheathed her claws. "He must be an atheist," she said savagely ; and then, having thrown some of the most sticky smelly mud at her disposal, she felt better.

In point of fact, it was by no means sure that the council would make Alec the next Mayor of Trowbury. His father had, during his year of office, become less popular with the governing cliques. He was suspected of having made a profit out of his mayoral salary, when by all right and precedent the town should have made a profit out of him.

Within two days, however, the matter was settled by the *Halfpenny Press*, in which there appeared a column headed :

ALEX. TROTMAN MAYOR OF TROWBURY  
PROPHET HONOURED IN HIS OWN COUNTRY  
SON TO SUCCEED FATHER IN MAYORAL CHAIR

Trowbury, having tasted notoriety, craved for more. The election had been settled in advance at the Blue Boar, and now the world's perusal clinched it.

## VII

Sir Pushcott Bingley's visit to the sick-room lasted but a short time. Alec was difficult ; he would not follow the conversational lead of the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*. He became impatient : wanted to know when the Holy Mountain was going to bring in some money—enough to live on, say, in a little house ;—asked why it could not be sold as it stood. For he did not yet understand in the least the financial and political part of the business.

When Sir Pushcott, anxious to avoid long explanations, counselled patience, and inquired if Alec was engaged, Mrs. Trotman said that her son was not strong enough to talk business, and hurried the baronet from the room. Suffering brains, she declared, ought not to be worried. Had Sir Pushcott, for all his journalistic genius, known how to deal individually and on an equality with women like Mrs. Trotman, he would have retorted that the stomach isn't the brain. Instead, he was polite and nonplussed. In a short time his motor car was bearing him over the Downs towards London.

Trowbury was outwardly calm. Although the *Half-penny Press* informed it daily of the Holy Mountain, Parliament, the invalid's progress, temperance and its bearing on the sacred right of liberty, the revival of the State Church (to be brought to a glorious fulness by means of the said Holy Mountain); although there was the usual crop of murders, divorces, disasters, and diseases; although this hotch-potch was served up daily with a *sauce piquante* of mighty headlines—Trowburians remained their old inert selves. They read, marked, and fell to at their parish pump. Drains took precedence over the Holy Mountain, a dog-fight over the parliamentary debate. Who knows they were not wise in their generation? Mr. Trotman alone said wonderful things over his glasses at the Blue Boar, desiring to make as much capital and to gain as much attention as possible out of the events that had befallen his family, without at the same time making public any matter that had, in the interests of both, to be kept private between the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* and the Famous Mayor and Grocer of Trowbury. He pointed out daily to his wife how much depended on her secrecy. It was perhaps lucky that, in attaining the rank and deportment of mayoress, she had offended her few

lady friends, and therefore, poor woman ! had no one, except the servant, to whom she could impart any secrets at all. In her husband's phrase, *Mum* was the word.

The sultry days of August were unfavourable to Alec's recovery. He developed an excitableness difficult to control, and a bad habit of nearly fainting when his will was crossed. He was like the small child who says cynically, " If you don't give in to me, I shall have a fit." Debility, the doctor called it, and once more prescribed entertainment.

Sir Pushcott's private secretary wrote, in answer to Mr. Trotman, that the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* was very busy, and that everything of importance he had to communicate would be found in the columns of the *Halfpenny Press*, a copy of which would be delivered daily at Mr. Trotman's establishment.

Deprived thus of his morning progress to and from the newspaper shop, Mr. Trotman took to reading the paper in his son's room. " Sir Pushcott is a very clever man," he remarked one day ; " I don't quite see through his little game, but you ought to be proud to know him, my boy." In love with strategy, he proposed chess, but at that Alec was his master and twice fool's-mated him.

The Conservative Government, on its last legs before the onslaught of the temperance reformers, and much harassed within its ranks by the uncompromising stubbornness of the brewing interest, was only too glad to give forth the new cry of *Individual Liberty* ! They acted faithfully by Sir Pushcott Bingley. They hardly dared to do otherwise. The Holy Mountain was debated ; the closure ruthlessly enforced. The Church, they said, had lacked encouragement to show what it could do. The Holy Mountain—Crown land, that is to say national land—ought not to remain untenanted and

useless, a standing disgrace to that sense of economy and efficiency that it was the duty of the Conservative party to foster. The sacred cause of religion. . . . The diminution of piety among the working classes. . . . After all, the nation owed a miracle, and London a mountain—a hill—an eminence—only to, and to no other than, Alexander Trotman. Who so fit as he to be rewarded, always with due regard to national interests? His Majesty's Government counted on the support of all right-thinking men in an act of elementary justice. . . .

A Liberal leader, an enthusiast on the subjects of social reform, small holdings and Back to the Land, declared eloquently that it would be a standing disgrace to the nation if such land, miraculously placed almost in the heart of London, were not used to produce a pure milk-supply for ailing slum babies. Amid roars of laughter, the Conservative agricultural members brought forward overwhelming evidence to show that cows cannot be fed on chalk downland, and the debate collapsed.

The temperature of London, and grouse shooting on the cooler northern moors, did the rest. Against all constitutional precedent, according to the Radicals, the Holy Mountain was made over to Alexander Trotman for a twenty-one years' lease, on the understanding that he would sublet it to the Church (for a period not debated owing to the cows), and that he would reward the landowners whose puddled fields had been buried beneath the hill, and also that he would compensate the relatives of the deceased families in accordance with the provisions of the Consolidated Compensation Acts.

The nation, led by the *Halfpenny Press*, rejoiced. Church bells were rung in some places. There was, it is true, something of an outcry when, after prorogation of Parliament, the President of the Board of

Trade authorised, of himself, the extension of the Central London tube railway to the foot of the Holy Mountain. But the *Halfpenny Press* pointed out that in a time of swift and ever-growing progress, national works could not, and ought not to, wait for Parliament's return from its holidays. Either Parliament would have to sit all the year round, or else ministers should be able to anticipate provisionally the enactments of a subsequent session. "The Constitution must be brought up to date!"

"That's only common sense," Mr. Trotman observed. "I've often told the town council the same thing, but they won't listen to reason and can't understand progress when they do."

## VIII

In September, Mrs. Trotman took Alec to Weymouth. She was secretly delighted at the prospect of showing her wonderful unfortunate son to the public outside his native town, and the public exhibited its appreciation in the customary manner—by mobbing him. On the third day of their visit, an American woman, not long landed from the Cherbourg boat, flung her arms round Alec, exclaiming: "You poor boy! I guess you English will beat us after all if you've gotten mountains to move for you." And she kissed him several times, as if he had been a pianist.

It was this episode which decided Mrs. Trotman to take Alec on to Weston-super-Mare, under the assumed style of Mrs. Alexander Argyll and Mr. Alexander Argyll, Jun. Visitors at the boarding-house wondered what woman it was who talked so constantly of good manners and decent privacy. A major's wife, they said,

until her extremely elegant and finical behaviour at table undeceived them. A romantic adventuress, they hazarded ; certainly *not* a relation of the Dukes of Argyll. The many portraits of Alec, which had appeared in the papers, were of little use in identifying him ; for the portraits had idealised him according to the popular notion of how a young mover of mountains ought to look, and illness had, so to speak, very much de-idealised him. Mrs. Argyll and son spent a fairly happy ten days at Weston before their landlady drew Mrs. Argyll aside after lunch and said : “ Dear Mrs. Argyll, there’s a lady come here, No. 13, who went to that Crystal Palace revival, and she says she’s *sure* your son is the Alexander Trotman who moved the mountain. Now, if you could tell me, quite in secret, that he has patronised my establishment. . . . Poor young gentleman ! It is so hard to make both ends meet. The short season here . . . to think of his looking so ill. . . .”

This was precisely what Mrs. Trotman had been hungering for. Quite in secret, during half an hour’s chat in the private back sitting-room, the landlady was informed of everything, and a good deal more besides. At dinner that evening, whilst the fishballs were being served (most of the guests were not interested in faked-up fish), there was something of an ovation—very nearly speeches. A spinster, resident in the house, offered Alec a share of her bottle of colonial port wine, and begged Mrs. Trotman to accept for her poor, poor son a box of the special strengthening pills recommended so highly by Lady Coate of Brandon. Only strong doses of brandy enabled Alec to leave Weston next day for Trowbury.

While he was away the question of the mayoralty settled itself. Those who talked much, Mr. Ganthorn in particular, impressed upon those who talked less,

three main considerations. First, that having a celebrated mayor would attract notice and wealthy residents to the salubrious town of Trowbury; second, that the political deadlock (whether the mayor should be Conservative or Liberal) would be avoided, since Alexander Trotman was too young to have political opinions and in any case had no vote; third—and this was the crowning reason—they of Trowbury would look such various sorts of fools if they did not, after all that had appeared in the Press, put the Mountain Mover into the high office of mayor. Mr. Trotman, with a show of modesty and reluctance, agreed perfectly. The Press, he said with an air of resignation, did expect the mayoralty to devolve upon his son. He could assure them, on the authority of his friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, that it was so. It was no use going against things. . . .

"And so say all of us!" they replied in effect.

The events of the Lord Mayor's week, as the children called it, began to excite the town, and fortunately drew attention from some muddle or other (no one knew exactly what) in the borough accounts.

On Sunday, November 6, the outgoing Mayor and the Corporation attended morning service at the Parish Church in all municipal state, preceded by mace-bearers and guarded by the Fire Brigade in full uniform. Alec was absent; his mother thought it best for him to husband his strength. The Vicar did not preach one of those excessively personal sermons which so delight a small town. He took as his text, *Take heed lest ye fall*; and under five heads followed by a peroration, in the good old-fashioned way, he showed how and why pride goes before a fall. Trowbury, already annoyed by the smallness of the Vicar's subscriptions to local objects, out of his stipend of £230 a year net, was still more incensed by what it termed his pessimism.

Church services, the windbags said, ought to be brighter. It was the clergy's own fault that people stayed away, as indeed they sometimes did, from church. If *they* had had the choosing of the hymns—nice bright hymns—something to sing at—something to buck them up for the stress and strain of modern life's money-making ! . . . What was the good of telling them they were miserable sinners ? How could the Vicar expect liberal Easter offerings if he took no pains to please Trowbury ?

On the Monday, the Outgoing Mayor's Supper took place, and it certainly went off better than the municipal Divine Service. Formerly, in heartier days, it had been called the Mayor's Wine Party, but in deference to teetotalers, the name had been altered to Outgoing Mayor's Supper. Not that its character was changed ; liquor was still consumed ; but the name—the name was more temperate, and reference to total abstinence as a cure-all for the poverty of the working classes could now be made in speeches. That was a famous victory for local temperance.

Alderman Trotman had spent but little during his year of office. With the help of his wife he had made a good show on small money. He reckoned, indeed, that if he took into account the free advertisement the mayoralty gave his business (in his official speeches he had frequently referred to the lamentable adulteration of food-stuffs, and, by implication, to the purity of the Famous Groceries), he was nothing out of pocket and his salary or honorarium as mayor was almost entirely clear profit. Therefore, with characteristic generosity, he decided that, retaining fifty pounds for himself exclusively, he would spend the other fifty in giving a really classy (his own word) outgoing supper. He ordered down from his own wholesale house several cases of wine and liqueurs at trade prices. He took

spirits out of bond. On the advice of Mr. Ganthorn, who had once attended a professional congress in Paris, absinthe was served in the antechamber before the meal, thus confirming the popular impression of the mayor's enterprise, his *savoir faire* and his interest in the *Entente Cordiale*. Most of the guests refused the stuff as too much like cough-mixture, but it is related by those who ought to know that in the night one worthy borough councillor had to drag her husband out from underneath the bed, whither, he averred, wild horses had chased him in his dreams.

Municipal dishes, in towns like Trowbury, preserve from year to year such a sameness that, contrary to general opinion, the speeches are often a welcome diversion from the food. The guests do eat, of course, and that right greedily, as a matter of long-standing habit ; they drink, too, because neither alcohol nor the virtuousness of abstaining ever palls ; and then they wait in a cloud of smoke to hear something about the latest borough squabble or the last of the council's muddles, or some complimentary reference to their own indispensable services.

The first one or two courses of Alderman Trotman's supper went rather heavily. Afterwards the guests, having tasted his wines and more of his strange liqueurs, congratulated him on his distinguished son, for whom several of those present prophesied greatness. Finally, when they had gone back to "Good old whiskey!"—as a witty alderman greeted it amid loud laughter—they fell to congratulating the outgoing Mayor on his noble self.

Hilarious was the remainder of the feast. Profuse the thanks. For an evening, at least, the burgesses were united. At the moment of breaking up, you might have thought the genial old days were back again. His worship, together with Mr. Ganthorn and Alderman

Clinch, stood on the pavement outside the Town Hall, singing—singing a religioso-sentimental ditty ! The police looked on respectfully.

Then, suddenly, the brute's teeth showed. A young woman, partly veiled, walked round the corner, touched Mr. Ganthorn's arm, and tried to draw him away to speak to him.

"Here, Mr. Mayor," shouted Ganthorn jocularly, "your progressive town's as bad as London."

Whereupon he saw who it was.

But Mr. Clinch was already saying, "Give her in charge."

"Yes, give her in charge," echoed the Mayor. "Here, constable, constable!"

"Very good, your worship."

"No, no!" said Ganthorn.

"Yes!" commanded his worship.

"Yes, yes. Of course. Disgraceful!" Mr. Clinch exclaimed.

"What for, sir?" asked the policeman, taking out his note-book.

"The usual," replied the Mayor, "in the public thoroughfare."

"But will any of you gentlemen come forward and give evidence to-morrow?" the policeman inquired.  
"It's no use me taking her in charge if you don't."

"What'll she get?" asked Ganthorn.

"Oh!" replied his worship, "I'll have her turned out of the town when she's done time."

Mr. Ganthorn was beginning to protest.

"Disgraceful!" repeated Mr. Clinch. "An offence against public morality. I will come."

"Take her away, constable," the Mayor continued.  
"You'll be all right. I shall be on the bench. Don't put me down as giving her in charge, and that'll be all right."

"Very good, your worship.—Come on, now! Come quiet!"

It was noteworthy how very quiet the young woman was.

The three borough fathers went on to Mr. Ganthorn's house, where, with some others earlier arrived, they extended the merriment of the evening.

And the policeman locked the young woman up. But, being kindly disposed to all such, a gallant policeman in his heart, he supplied her with paper, pencil, and an envelope; allowed her to write a note addressed to Miss J. Jepp, and went slightly off his beat in order to drop the letter into the letter-box of Clinch's Emporium.

## IX

Very early on Mayor's Day Mrs. Trotman got up and peeped out of the window. To her great relief there was no rain, though a black north-easter was blowing off the Downs.

When Mr. Trotman marched downstairs it was in his cotton shop-jacket and trodden-over carpet slippers. But even he was flurried. "Get that boy up," he said to his wife.

"But I want him to sleep on as long as he can," replied that lady, who had got up dressed for going out or for receiving visitors.

"Get him up, I say. He's not ill now. Laziness, that's what 'tis. He'll be late. My mayoralty has gone off all right and I'll see that his does too."

"Twouldn't have if it hadn't been for me hurrying you out of bed often and often. Why, I've half dressed you ever so many mornings!"

"Be quiet! I'm busy."

The police inspector entered :

"Court is at ten, your worship."

"Right. Any cases ? "

"Only the one from last night."

"H'm. . . . Need we take it ? Give her another chance."

"Must be taken now, your worship. Gone too far. She's been in the cells all night."

"I'll be there then."

As the inspector was going out, Messrs. Ganthorn and Clinch came in :

"I say, how about that girl, Mr. Mayor ? "

"I'm going to hear the case at ten o'clock."

"But look here, I can't give evidence. There'll be a scandal. You know how people talk."

Mr. Clinch took up the protest : "And I can't possibly come," he said. "Autumn stocktaking. Means pounds to me."

"But you're coming to the council meeting and church and the dinner, aren't you ? "

"That's another thing. Duty. Besides, I don't know whether I shall be able to get away for church."

Mr. Clinch's large fat face did not look very pressed for time. "I shall go up to Town by the nine-fifty if I've got to appear."

"And where will you go to in Town, eh ? " Mr. Ganthorn inquired.

Silence.

Each spent a few moments measuring the other one's and his own interests.

Mr. Clinch walked to the door, stood there fumbling his heavy watch-chain, snorting and puffing, wishing for the wings of a dove, perhaps. Meanwhile Mr. Ganthorn buttonholed the Justice of the Peace.

"Look here, Trotman, I simply mustn't be mixed

up in this. D'you hear ? If I am, I shall *make reprisals*. Those borough accounts. . . .”

“ All right, all right ! There's no need to talk like that. I'll see to it. We don't want anything of that sort to-day. Everything will be in the London papers. Those infernal reporters. . . . We're stark in the eyes of the world here. I'll work it all right, and if I can't I'll allow an adjournment. I don't suppose she'll be represented by a lawyer.”

Mr. Ganthorn's face brightened. As he hurried out of the door to catch up Mr. Clinch, he called back : “ The better the day the better the deed, Trotman ! ”

And as he went down the street with Mr. Clinch, he remarked sapiently : “ You can always twist that old fool round your finger if you know the way to get at him.”

Nevertheless the tone of his voice was by no means free from anxiety.

## X

News spread rapidly through the town : “ There's a good case coming on before the beak ! ” Somewhat before ten o'clock, a little knot of people had gathered outside the double door on which was painted in bold white letters MAGISTRATES' COURT, PUBLIC ENTRANCE. From minute to minute another loiterer would join the group, or a cyclist would dismount at the edge of the pavement and remain talking there. A butcher's cart, a farmer's gig, a motor car drew up in the road. An air of expectancy was noticeable in everybody.

When the Mayor arrived a movement was made to view him, and while he was passing in through the magistrates' entrance, he heard behind him a faint-hearted hoot, and a “ Well, what 'bout it, 'Mendment Trotman ? ”

He had hardly thought that news of the case would have spread abroad so early. He felt an impulse to turn back and have it out with the impertinent person, but, luckily remembering his dignity, conquering nobly the base instinct, he proceeded within and took his seat in the dark fusty little court. Also on the bench, there beforehand, was one of those magisterial nonentities who, attending every court, do little except give seven days and platitudinous advice to tramps. Those two magistrates would take the charges. Mr. Trotman's will would be free from interference.

Before the prisoner was brought in, however, the Superintendent of Police desired respectfully to congratulate his worship on an occurrence without precedent in the history of Trowbury, namely that, from that day forward, father and son would be sitting on the same borough bench. The police, he said, had always found his worship a just, helpful, and 'perspicuous' magistrate. No doubt his distinguished son would have inherited the same qualities, only he, the Superintendent, hoped that the Mayor-elect would not try his, the Mayor-elect's miraculous powers upon the court, the police station, or the prison. [Laughter.] The Mayor-elect must be in possession of powers as yet unexplained by science. But the police were only ordinary men. There had been complaints against them, but his worship knew that they always tried to discharge their difficult and onerous duties to the best of their ability.

His worship signified that he did know, and beamed upon the Superintendent.

Applause in court.

The magistrate's clerk—a white-haired old man whose robust common sense had directed many a fuddled magistrate, and had prevented many a miscarriage of justice—was heard to break his quill and to growl, "Dam'd rot!"

His worship would now hear the case.

Miss Starkey, small and frail, was brought in by a large blue constable who appeared positively to overhang her. Every neck craned forward. She looked round defiantly, recognised some one at the back of the court, and smiled.

The charge, solicitation, was read over to her.

Evidence was brought by the police to the effect that on the previous evening she, being twenty-four years of age, did behave in a wanton and disorderly manner in the streets of Trowbury, outside the Town Hall, to wit ; that she had been of no occupation since the birth of her child ; that she was unmarried ; but she had never applied for an affiliation order ; that she was not known to have any private means ; that she plucked a certain gentleman's arm outside the Town Hall ; that she made certain overtures to him ; that it was not known exactly what she said.

His worship remarked severely that it was the worst case of the sort he had ever had to try, and that he was glad to know prisoner was not a native of Trowbury. More evidence was called for, but, as the police explained, the gentleman refused to appear against her. His worship had been present. . . .

"Can't be in the bench and in the witness-box too," said the magistrates' clerk. "Is there no more evidence, nothing as to what she said ? You'd better discharge her, sir."

Mr. Trotman began a speech setting forth the wickedness of the prisoner's conduct, the sad immorality of her life, and the good repute of Trowbury. Before he had got very far, a note was handed up to him from a young woman at the back of the court. He read ; gasped ; and ended his speech abruptly with : "As you are a first offender, Starkey, the sentence of the court is that the police be instructed to see that you betake your-

self from the town of Trowbury within twenty-four hours."

"That's a bit better," observed the clerk.

Miss Starkey was removed. When she was ready to leave the precincts of the court, the friendly policeman told her : " You're living outside the town, ain't you ? He didn't say as how you wasn't to live where you have been, but don't you get caught at it again, my dear, or you'll get it hot."

His worship said, before leaving the bench, that people would see now, he hoped, his good reasons for dismissing the prisoner . . .

"Not the prisoner," interjected the clerk.

"For dismissing the *late* prisoner," continued Mr. Trotman, "from her place in my establishment."

After his worship had departed (to the Blue Boar) and whilst the court was being closed up again, the note was found beneath the magistrate's chair, whither it must have dropped instead of into the worshipful pocket. It was read aloud to the accompaniment of a general laugh ; for it ran :

"It was your own son that got her into trouble,  
Mr. Trotman."

"I doubt it," said the clerk, gathering up his papers.

Mr. Clinch very soon heard that his assistant, Miss Jepp, had been at the police court and had sent up to Mr. Trotman a note which made him look queer. It was also reported to Mr. Clinch, that she had been in constant communication with, and had visited regularly, the unhappy Miss Starkey. He therefore tried menacingly to question her on the interesting and disgraceful subject, and that failing, he gave her a month's notice of dismissal in such opprobrious terms that she decided to leave that same day, and did so. Unfortunately, he could not prevent her (Mrs. Clinch refused to have

anything to do with seizing her luggage), nor could he well claim a month's wages from her in lieu of notice, as he would otherwise have done ; for his pure wrath had led him to attack her before every one in the Emporium in such impure language that a full half-dozen could have borne witness against him had he sued Miss Jepp or had she brought an action against him for defamation of character.

He pitied himself profoundly, and wondered what the world was coming to.

## XI

Mrs. Trotman had a very trying morning with her son, the Mayor-elect. As the hour of the statutory meeting of the borough council drew near, he suddenly took it into his head to look on mayor-making as an insupportable ordeal ; and he declared that, if they really wanted to make him Mayor, they could easily do it in his absence. "For goodness' sake, don't tell your father so !" exclaimed poor Mrs. Trotman. She tried to brace up her son first with thin gruel and brandy, then with hot bovril, then with a special brand of tinned truffled chicken that he was fond of, and lastly with port-wine jelly. Three-quarters of an hour before noon Mr. Trotman returned home from court ; he said :

"Where's Alec ?"

"He's not very well, James."

"Can't help that now. See he's ready. Where's my white shirt ? Where have you put my patent boots ? Has he got a clean collar ?"

"James ! As if I shouldn't see to that. . . ."

"All right : I haven't always. Make haste. Not a moment to spare."

At the end of a period of tremendous bustle, the

Mayor took the Mayor-elect off to the Town Hall. He remarked on the way that the Mayor-elect had not shaved himself properly behind the jaw and wanted to know why he hadn't been to a hairdresser's for once.

Several councillors were waiting at the entrance and in the vestibule. They were telling each other beforehand what they were going to say—like naughty boys outside a headmaster's study door ;—for which reason it was that the statutory meeting in the old Georgian council chamber, hung round with framed charters and portraits of past Mayors and curiously decorated royalties, resolved itself into a reproduction of rehearsed harangues and a reduction thereof by the local reporters into something resembling King's English.

Alec was told that he was a lucky young dog, and then the council seated itself for business, the Mayor-elect being on the right hand of the outgoing Mayor. Nominations for the office of Mayor were formally invited—the election had, of course, been settled long ago. Mr. Ganthorn rose to speak. He stood silent till only the fatter councillors' breathing could be heard, then :

“ There is no need,” he said, perhaps with double meaning, “ to make long speeches. Alderman Trotman, the Mayor, and Mr. Alexander Trotman, the Mayor-elect, are both of them as well known as they are highly respected. I have been connected with them in many business transactions, public as well as private, and have always found them honest and straightforward and upright. The man who succeeds in business is the man to trust in public affairs—look at the immense progress of America under the rule of business men. It is the first time within living memory that our Mayor has been chosen from without the council. It is the first time in the history of our loyal and ancient borough that a son has succeeded his father in the highest office

it is ours to confer. But I need say no more, because the occasion and the reason of it is public throughout the land, and our mayoral election here is a national affair, and Trowbury stands—thanks to the Press—before the eyes of the civilised world. That, gentlemen, is good for trade. The hotel proprietors are already reporting better receipts. It is good for trade, I repeat. The fortunes of Trowbury are on the turn. On the advantages of choosing a mayor outside the council, and they are many, I will not now enlarge. Some towns have lords and earls. Mr. Alexander Trotman is not a lord or an earl—though nobody knows what *may* happen—[applause]—but he is more celebrated than either. I beg to propose Mr. Alexander Trotman as Mayor. The Mountain-Mover, the Miracle Worker ! Long live Alexander . . . I beg your pardon."

"This isn't the Mayor's dinner, Ganthorn !" arose in a chorus which was not taken down by the reporters.

Alderman Clinch rose to say a few words seconding the motion. In the excitement of speech-making, he relapsed from the polite tones of a draper's shop to the mongrel English of a provincial burgess, retaining, nevertheless, some of the delicacy which he was accustomed to use in selling garments to a lady. He endorsed every word his good friend, Mr. Ganthorn, had said, and remarked in speaking of the Mayor-elect : "I do think as it's wonderful to do what he did moving Ramshorn Hill to London without even taking a third-class ticket for it [which joke did not go down] and in succeeding his respected father as mayor of this here town. [Applause.] We're all proud for to know Messrs. Trotman and Son. It's a good old firm, I say. I'm not going to say much, as I knows of, but I do want to say that this is a proud day for Messrs. Trotman, and a proud day for the good old town of Trowbury ; and I

hope Alderman Trotman will do good business and Master Alec bring good trade to the town for many a year to come, I do. And I desire to take this here opportunity of congratulating both on 'em. That's all as I've got to say. . . . Oh, yes ! I seconds the motion."

"And zo zay all on us !" cried a young member who was opposed in politics to Mr. Clinch, and who, not being listened to, looked innocent with a faint *he-he* !

The motion was put and carried unanimously amid a loud applause that only the Town Clerk's forbidding legal aspect prevented from becoming uproarious. Mr. Trotman rose from his seat and made Alec do the same. Round his son's neck he placed the chain of office ; to him he gave the seal ; and then, exchanging places, he sat him down rather forcibly in the mayoral chair. Alec swore sundry quaint and formidable oaths, signed what the Town Clerk called the long and honourable roll of the Mayors of Trowbury, and was once more egged out of his chair—this time to return thanks.

It was a part of the ceremony for which his father had forgotten to prepare him. He stood up blankly. Then, remembering no doubt the tone of the speeches that had gone before, he began : "Thank you very much, gentlemen. A great honour. I didn't want to be Mayor —'true as I'm here. . . ."

Realising he had not said quite the right thing, he looked round at his father ; looked at the councillors seated along the table in various comfortable attitudes, one or two of them with sympathetic faces ; looked up at the ceiling ; blushed ; sat down.

The ex-Mayor sprang up :

"As you know, gentlemen, my son, the Mayor, has hardly yet recovered from a long and dangerous illness, and under the circumstances you will not expect him to thank you at length for the very great honour you have done him—us—our family. Speaking as an alder-

man and a tradesman in a large way of business, and not as father of the present Mayor, I can only say that, in making my son Mayor, we have done the very best thing for the town. Gentlemen, I believe in advertisement. It is by advertisement—and a sound stock—that I have built up my business from a small way to the largest and growing grocery establishment in the town. I believe, I say, in advertisement ; advertisement for a business and advertisement for a town, which is only a large business with the Mayor as director. My friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, whom we hope to see at the dinner to-night—[applause]—he assures me that to-day's proceedings will be fully reported and illustrated in the greatest newspaper the world has ever seen. I allude to the *Halfpenny Press*. That is what I call a thorough good advertisement for our good old town. I hope you will forgive my son, our Mayor, any shortcomings due to his youth, bad health, or inexperience ; and I can assure you that I shall always be at his right hand to make his year of office a success and to help in the progress of the good old loyal borough of Trowbury.”

During the subsequent business, which included the election of new aldermen and the appointment of the year's committees, Mr. Trotman did make himself of the very greatest use. But for his repeated admonition, “ Harmony, gentlemen ! Harmony on *this* day ! ” and his skill in defeating by amendments and relegation to committee any inquiry into the state of the borough's minor finances, his son's first council meeting would in all probability have been the reverse of pleasant.

At the conclusion, he invited the council to accompany his son, the Mayor, to the parish church at half-past three in the afternoon.

And in the street, after the meeting had been broken up, while the usual after-meeting was being held, it

was discovered that the customary vote of thanks to the ex-Mayor had been clean forgotten.

"Don't mention it, gentlemen," said the ex-Mayor.  
"My son's election is *my* vote of thanks."

Mrs. Trotman had wished Alec to have a brand new mayoral robe; she wanted to choose the material herself; but Mr. Trotman ridiculed the idea. If the old one was good enough for his own self, wasn't it good enough for his son? Mrs. Trotman spent most of the time between the statutory meeting and the church service in trying to clean out a recognisable wine-stain on the left-hand side of the robe's front. She consulted her favourite chemist as to the best solvent for iron-mouldy stains. After much hard work, she succeeded in turning the stain into a blotch, and in cleaning only too visibly a circle of the robe just around the blotch—in giving the blotch a halo, as it were.

In a furred blue blotted mantle did Alec march from the Town Hall to the parish church. The Vicar, the mace-bearers and the town-crier went before him, his father almost beside him, and his mother a short way off with the smelling-salts. The procession, coloured in front and funereally black behind, proceeded with step slow and dignified from the grey November daylight into the dim parish church. The congregation which had gathered there stood up while the corporation passed up the nave to its high carved wooden seats in the chancel. Out of the blackness the sound of the organ crept as if it were a messenger from some nether world or from the depths of Trowbury's history.

Mrs. Trotman had made the Vicar promise that divine service should be as short as possible, for, she said, Alec could not attend a long service and the dinner too, and it was most necessary he should be present at the dinner. For that reason the Vicar, an uncompromising churchman in controversy, contented himself in the

pulpit with expressing his satisfaction that the youthful Mayor, after taking part in a heretical revival at the Crystal Palace, should, on the most important day of his young life, have returned to his mother-church, the church where he had been christened—a step taken, no doubt, on his own initiative, for which he was greatly to be honoured. Much more he said in the same vein, receiving Alec into his church as a very prodigal son.

Tactless Vicar ! Mr. Trotman was furious. Dictate what his son should and should not do, indeed ! Hadn't his son come to church that day at the risk of his health, at the risk of his life perhaps ? There was a nodding and a whispering among the members of the corporation as they prepared to leave their seats and to march down to the west door.

Suddenly, just at the crossing of the aisles, an old woman in a black wobbling bonnet trimmed with bobby-dazzlers, ran out of a pew and flung herself on Alec.

" Ea, Master Allie, how glad I be to see 'ee in that there nice gown ! But don' 'ee go movin' no more hills and losin' the squire's lambs. How like your dear father you d' look ! An' I've nursed both on 'ee, I have ! "

She insisted on a kiss. " Give your ol' nursie a kiss, now do 'ee." Then she brought his head down to a level with hers and whispered loudly : " They be goin' to leave the little chap 'long with me when they goes to Lon'on, an' you come out an' see your own just whenever you like. Blood's thicker than water, Allie dear. . . ."

Mr. Trotman replaced her forcibly in her pew. With all its antique dignity the corporation left the church. A reverent babble arose. How the ex-Mayor had scowled !

Merrily the bells clashed out.

## XII

Alec himself did not understand fully the drift of old Mrs. Parfitt's speech in church. This is what had happened :

When Mr. Clinch had given notice to Julia in a volley of unclean language, she had rushed from the shop to her bedroom red in the face and breathless with indignation. She intended to pack and leave the Emporium at once. But what could she do ? She would have either to go down below again and claim the wages that were due to her, or find Mrs. Clinch, or spend three days drawing enough money from the Post Office Savings Bank. She could not possibly go right away at once. After she had calmed down a little, concluding that she might just as well be hung for a sheep as a bodkin, and feeling inclined to do nothing so much as to defy Mr. Clinch, she put on her yellow hat, now long past its prime, and a jacket, and hurried off out in the direction of Mrs. Parfitt's. The rapid walk by heating her body further cooled her mind. Her attention was distracted by the dead leaves that an autumn wind blew down upon her head. They fell into the brim of her hat, and she had to take it off, still walking quickly, in order to clean them out. The age of the hat shocked her. She had not the moral support of being well dressed. And how miserably the varicose veins in her right leg ached !

Further up the road she saw three or four loutish youths scrambling along with comic gait after a woman whose skirts swung and flapped around her because she was going at a greater pace than her legs were made for. "Surely," Julia thought, "that's Edie's short jacket or one very like it, and Edie's hat. . . ."

It was Miss Starkey.

She stopped and, turning round, gesticulated angrily at the louts behind her. The wind lifted her hat upright. The louts laughed recklessly. She whisked round again and hastened on with the louts still behind her, still mimicking her gait.

Julia caught them up. She took Miss Starkey's arm and looked a look at the louts. Dropping behind with a last ribald insult, they stopped to light cigarettes.

All that Miss Starkey asked Julia or said to her was, "What d'you want?"

"Edie dear, I'll come with you. I was coming out. I was, really."

"You can come if you like.—Oh, Julie! I feel so faint."

"There, there!" Julia cosseted her; and they walked on to the cottage. Julia wept a little, but without breaking down. Edith Starkey remained sulky and dry-eyed. Her face and manner revealed her state of mind.

Mrs. Parfitt in her lonely little cottage knew nothing of what had happened either to Miss Starkey or to Julia. Having the baby to herself had pleased the old woman, and so had the absence for a night of the baby's mother, whom she had come rather to dislike and had kept at the cottage only because she was lonely, and for the baby's and for her Allie and his sweetheart's sake. Though quite certain in her old woman's mind that Alec was at the bottom of Miss Starkey's mischance, she did not inquire, neither was she told.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "where *have* you been to, leaving the baby and all. And I've a-had to feed 'en wi' spoon-food and he's done beautiful 'cept for a bit o' wind in his precious little tummie."

Miss Starkey took her baby. Then at last she wept, while old Mrs. Parfitt ejaculated from time to time: "Here's a pretty kettle o' fish! Here's a pretty kettle o' fish. I do declare! Now, do 'ee, my dear. . . . There, there! try an' bide quiet."

Events to date were related—with certain reservations. Miss Starkey spoke of Mr. Ganthorn, and his domestic arrangements, with a vehemence which rather astonished and mystified Julia. Mrs. Parfitt was told about the police court, and that Mr. Trotman had only sentenced Miss Starkey to remove herself from the moral town of Trowbury. It was the policeman and the sentence which had fixed themselves in Mrs. Parfitt's mind, much more than the injustice, for since she had lived among labouring people she had lost her hold on official morality and had come to regard troubles with the police as a part of life.

"Ah!" she said, "Mr. Trotman let 'ee off wi' that, did he, when you didn't ought to have been summoned at all. But he didn't know that, bless you. He's such a kind sort o' man. But look 'ee, my dears, if I be going to see Master Alec go to church in his mayor's mantle an' all, I must hurry up, an' I 'spect the baker's cart, as I've a-give a cup o' tea to many a time on a hot day, will gie I a lift into Trowbury."

Mrs. Parfitt had two lady's maids that afternoon. Her hair was done and her bonnet set jauntily on her head so that she said she'd hardly ha' know'd herself ; and off she went in her baker's cart.

Then the two young women, each disgraced, both lonely, fell to talking over ways and means.

What they did not tell one another was the most important part of their conversation. Miss Starkey allowed Julia to think her very very greatly wronged, nothing more ; while Julia hid the practical charity in her heart—the very real charity from a woman in her position—under a gush of sentiment. Occasionally one of them sniffed and dropped a few tears. Neither was able to suggest any promising course of action until Julia said that her old guv'nor in London might take her back.

"London! London!" Miss Starkey took up the word, and the hope that lay in it, with all the ardour which London imposes on untravelled provincials. "London!" They would go to London. That was it.

But baby? Who would take care of the baby? Mrs. Parfitt? Miss Starkey was sure she would. Julia thought so too. She still had some money in spite of what she had lent—or given—Miss Starkey. Instead of a new dress, she had had the yellow one turned and retrimmed. The material had been good. . . .

"You're a dear, Julie!"

But London! They rang the changes on the magic word, the first mention of which had been decisive.

Damnable Dick Whittington!

After dark—they were sitting without a light—Mrs. Parfitt's small toppling footsteps approached the cottage.

"I've a seen him an' I lost me head, I did, an' I didn't mean to, but there. . . . An' I kissed 'en as he were coming down the church in his lovely big blue mantle, an' I told 'en as the little chap were as right as ninepence an' as he could come out an' see 'en just the same now he *is* Mayor; an' his father, he took hold o' my poor arm an' pushed I into the wrong pew; but I did kiss 'en an' I told 'en the little dear (let I give 'en a kiss!) was quite bonny out here an' as good a baby as you might find; an' look you what a bruise he've a-made on my poor arm—black an' blue—he always had a temper when he were a boy, Jimmy did!"

She slipped off her bodice and exhibited the blue mark on her withered old arm. While that was going on, the two girls asked her if she would keep the baby with her.

"On course I will, pretty dear! Not having no childer o' me own. . . . Deary me! Just you leave he here. I've a-nursed James Trotman, an' Master Allie, both on 'em mayors, an' why shouldn't I nurse this little

precious too, for company like. The babies as I nurse be all mayors."

"There's the Mayor's Dinner to-night," said Miss Starkey, who always showed impatience when Mrs. Parfitt babbled on, and always had festivities in her mind.

"They must be going in to it now," Julia added. "I must go. I really must. Good-bye, dear."

"Don't you get in their light when they're coming out —that's all!"

Miss Starkey's voice could be very bitterly unpleasant. The *that's all* echoed in Julia's ears as she walked back to the Emporium. It seemed to be dragging her into the company of the non-respectable. It depressed her and made her feel as if the world was off its hinges. Again the side-door of the Emporium banged behind her as if she were still its property, still forced to sell herself for a bed, bad food, and a few dresses. *That's all!*

And it was all.

### XIII

In reporting the mayoral banquet, the *Trowbury Guardian*, with a humility and enterprise rare among local newspapers, did its best to imitate the *Halfpenny Press*. It was notably successful in the use of headlines.

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

ALEXANDER TROTMAN

MADE

MAYOR

OF HIS NATIVE TOWN

(Then followed an account in pyrotechnical language of the investiture of Alec Trotman as Mayor of the ancient borough, together with photographs of himself and his relatives, and a faked reproduction, from a borrowed block, of the Mountain Mover standing in an inspired attitude on the summit of a precipitous Holy Mountain.)

TROWBURY'S MAYOR'S  
BANQUET  
BRILLIANT LOCAL FUNCTION  
DELAINE JENKYNs, M.P.  
IN THE CHAIR  
IMPORTANT SPEECHES  
THE MAYOR'S HEALTH  
INTERVIEW WITH HIS DOCTOR  
*Full copyright account*  
TROWBURY CHRONICLE ENLARGED  
TO SIXTY COLUMNS

"Yesterday, at noon, surrounded by the aldermen and councillors assembled in the historic council chamber, Mr. Alexander Trotman was unanimously elected Mayor of Trowbury, and invested with the heavy gold chain of office. The value of the mayoral chain is estimated at £420. In the fine old parish church, beneath tattered flags from Waterloo, Inkerman and Balaklava, his mayoralty received Divine Sanction. Alexander Trotman, Mayor of Trowbury ! The prophet honoured in his own country !

**" THE MAYORAL BANQUET**

was held in the Town Hall Assembly Rooms. A good spread, worthy of Trowbury's gastronomic traditions, was provided by mine host of the Blue Boar Hotel, reinforced by a celebrated London caterer. The tipsy cake was moulded into the form of the Holy Mountain, and inlaid with the heraldic arms of Trowbury in coloured jellies.

" The Mayor was surrounded by a representative company of aldermen, councillors, borough officials, and burgesses, and by the flower of the local nobility and gentry.

" The Right Honourable Delaine Jenkyns, Member for the Trowbury division of Wiltshire, occupied the chair.

" Grace before and after meat was said by the Vicar of Trowbury.

" The Chairman first gave the toast of King and Empire, followed by that of the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Royal Family. Great and loyal enthusiasm prevailed.

**" UNAVOIDABLE ABSENTEES**

" The Chairman read a telegram from the King :

*" I am commanded by his Majesty to thank the loyal and ancient borough of Trowbury.*

" A telegram from Sir Pushcott Bingley, Bart., Director of the *Halfpenny Press*, was next read :

*" Empire watching Mountain Mover's festive banquet. Deeply regret detained in town.*

" It was understood that the ex-Mayor had also received a private communication from Sir Pushcott Bingley. When the resounding applause which followed the reading of the telegram had died down, and letters of apology for unavoidable absence had been read from

several noblemen and gentlemen, Mr. Ald. Clinch, the senior alderman, gave in felicitous terms the Bishop and Clergy and Ministers of all Denominations.

“ The Vicar, in replying, alluded to the strange coincidence that the evening the miracle transpired he had been preaching from the text : ‘ If ye have faith even as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove.’ He regarded it as another sign of Almighty God’s watchfulness over His Church and over Trowbury. It spoke well for the natural pleasures of temperate eating and drinking, that the clergy and ministers of all denominations could be found at the mayoral banquet peaceably seated together. He was sorry to see how few of the well-cooked dishes the Mayor was able to partake of, and hoped it would please God to mercifully restore his health—[applause]—grant him a long, useful life—[applause]—and graciously accept his miraculous work for the good of His Holy Church. [Great applause.]

#### “ REV. SNOOKS’ PRAYER

“ The Rev. Bertram Snooks (Congregational), in responding for the other denominations, said they lived in critical times, and everything that tended to promote the cause of religion in an atheistical age—[‘ No, no ! ’]—was to be encouraged. Such, he felt, was the removal of the Holy Mountain and the heartfelt, heartening revival at the Crystal Palace, where the attendance of the Mayor, who had worked so great a miracle, even as the prophets of old, had evoked a scene of extraordinary religious enthusiasm—[applause]—and many souls were brought to repentance. He craved permission on so auspicious an occasion to offer up the following prayer : ‘ O Almighty God, who art always with us when upon our knees we cry unto thee, vouchsafe that our beloved

young Mayor shall receive Thy blessing, and shall evermore perform miracles to the glory of Thine elect, to the furtherance of true religion wheresoever found, and to the confusion of the stiff-necked and of sinners, in Thy Holy Name, Amen.'

"At this stage of the festivities the Vicar pleaded attendance at a bed of sickness, and left.

"The toast of the Army, Navy and other Imperial and Territorial Forces was given amidst intense enthusiasm, one of the councillors remarking that if they could not have work for all, undoubtedly a strong Navy was the next best thing. [Applause.]

#### "THE TOAST OF THE EVENING

"The Chairman in very complimentary terms gave the toast of the evening,—His Worship the Mayor. There had, he said, been many able and distinguished men who had held this exalted civic office in days gone by. Such was the ex-Mayor, the father of the present Mayor. Never in the history of the ancient borough of Trowbury, he was informed—never in England, he thought—had a son succeeded his father in the highest office a town can confer. Some men, said the Swan of Avon, Gentle Shakespeare, were born great, some achieved greatness, and some had greatness thrust upon them. In Mr. Alexander Trotman, their Mayor, all those qualifications were united. He had been born great—with the power of working miracles. He had achieved greatness—by moving the Holy Mountain and once more proving the eternal truths of religion and faith—[applause]. And greatness—the mayoralty of his native town had been thrust upon him—[prolonged applause]. The government, supported by a large majority in the Parliament where he (the speaker) had the honour to be Trowbury's representative, had granted a long lease of the Holy Mountain, as it stood in Acton,

to Mr. Alexander Trotman—[applause]. Quite right—[applause]. It was not a party question—[applause]. The labourer was worthy of his hire—[applause]. Mr. Trotman would receive the aid and advice of his (the chairman's) friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, than whom no greater commercial genius had ever lived—[applause] ; and commerce, he would remind them, was now the primary occupation of mankind—[applause], the golden girdle that encircled it from pole to pole—[prolonged applause]. He understood that Mr. Alexander Trotman would devote the Holy Mountain entirely to religious purposes [hear, hear]; to a great revival of unsectarian religion, to the broad fundamental basis of religion on which they could all agree. A banquet, however, was not the precise place to discuss religious matters, as the Rev. Vicar and Mr. Snooks would tell them. Therefore he would conclude an over-long speech—['No, no ! ']—by congratulating Mr. Alexander Trotman on attaining, so early in life, the high and well-deserved position of Mayor of Trowbury—[great applause]—and he congratulated Trowbury on its distinguished young Mayor—[tumultuous applause].

“ ‘ For he’s a jolly good fellow ! ’ was begun, taken up on all sides of the room, repeated, and sung with right vigorous good-will for several minutes. When the last ‘ And so all say of us ! ’ died away, the youthful Mayor, looking very pale in his heavy, blue, fur-edged robe of office, rose from his seat at the right-hand of the Chairman to respond.

#### “ THE MAYOR’S SPEECH

“ Holding a small piece of white paper in a hand that trembled perceptibly, the Mayor replied : ‘ Mr. Chairman, Alderman, Councillors, and gentlemen, I thank you heartily and will do my best to show myself worthy of the high honour you have conferred upon me.’

" It was universally felt how much the grave simplicity of the Mayor's speech accorded with the greatness of the occasion. From all parts of the room sympathetic eyes were turned upon the young mayor, when the ex-Mayor rose to speak.

" THE MAYOR'S HEALTH

" The Ex-Mayor (Mr. Ald. James Trotman) trusted they would excuse a longer speech from his son, the Mayor, who had, as they all knew, scarcely recovered from a long and dangerous illness. After describing in some detail his son's malady, the ex-Mayor remarked that only temperate habits and the best of mothers—his (the ex-Mayor's) best of wives and helpmeets—could have pulled the Mayor through. And the help of God also should not be forgotten. He could not but be very thankful for the Divine Watch which had been kept over him and his. He was not, as they knew, a minister, nor did he make great professions of religion, nor use religion as a cloak, but he was always ready to pay his debts, and he thanked God from the bottom of his heart. As their Member of Parliament had told them, the Holy Mountain was to be devoted exclusively to religious purposes. They should render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's. Soon after the New Year there would be an Imperial Revival, organised by the Church on behalf of all the Christians of the Empire, on the hill so miraculously removed to the outskirts of the metropolis. His friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, to whose generous advice he and the Mayor owed so much, had kept him informed of the progress which was being made by builders, railways, tramways, and, indeed, every resource of modern civilisation. Miracles of building were in progress, rivalling the energy of America. The eyes of the Empire were turned towards the Holy Mountain ! [Applause.]

**“ THE MAYOR RETIRES**

“ At this stage, the Mayor, doubtless overcome by the applause and smoke, was seen to droop. There was hardly a dry eye in the room when the ex-Mayor was seen to bend over him and to murmur, ‘ Better go home to bed, my boy ! ’—when the proud and devoted father assisted his son from the room.

“ Mr. Ald. Ganthorn humorously proposed the Borough Recorder and Town Clerk and Clerk of the Peace. But for crime, he said, two of them at least would be non-existent. In that measure the town was indebted to crime. He observed that they were nuisances after the deed, and instanced them as showing what a pleasant thing a nuisance can sometimes be. Doubtless the Mayor was a nuisance when, as a baby, the ex-Mayor had to walk the room with him at night. Nobody could say he was a nuisance now—[applause].

“ The Recorder, in responding, said that the town of Trowbury, now so celebrated on account of its Mayor, would ever hold a foremost place in his heart. He thanked them with the deepest gratitude for the warmth of the reception accorded him.

“ On the return of the ex-Mayor, the Chairman gave the ex-Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the Borough of Trowbury, speaking in the highest terms of his good friend, the ex-Mayor.

**“ THE EX-MAYOR ON MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT**

“ Alderman Trotman, in responding, said the day had been too much for his son, the Mayor, and almost too much for himself. He was a plain man, but had done his best for the old town—[applause]. He had begun his year of office with the belief that in municipal affairs, as in business, honesty and integrity and work—hard work—was the best policy. And so it had turned

out. He thanked them. It was a proud day for him—[applause]. It was the day of his life. He felt he had not come into the world for nothing. He thought they might all take away one lesson, which his mother had instilled into him at her knee, and that was, that honesty pays best in the long run—[applause]. In the absence of the Mayor, he begged to propose the health of the best of parliamentary representatives, their Chairman, the Right Hon. Delaine Jenkyns, M.P.

“When the cheering evoked by this toast had died down, the Chairman suitably responded. To further the interests of the town of Trowbury would always, he declared, remain the one bright ambition of his life—[renewed cheers].

“This concluded the toast list. Though several of the guests, including the Chairman who had to catch a train, now retired, the proceedings were prolonged to a later hour under the presidency of the ex-Mayor.

“An exceptionally good musical programme had been provided. The Town Band played outside the banqueting room during dinner, and between and after the toasts, Mr. Charles Barnes and Mr. Munchanson, L.R.C.M., rendered such old favourites as *The Death of Nelson*, *Good Old Mary Ann*, *Tom Bowling*, *Marble Halls*, *Simon the Cellarer*, *Gates of the West*, *Excelsior*, *Glorious Beer*, *The New Jerusalem*, and *From Liverpool across the Atlantic*, concluding with *Rule Britannia* and *God Save the King*. Both were in excellent voice and used them to good effect. Seldom has Trowbury heard better postprandial song. It was universally agreed that this year’s Mayoral Banquet was a brilliant function, worthy of the best traditions of the town and of the importance of the occasion.”

The most characteristic, the most Trowburian, part of the feast did not find its way into print in the *Trow-*

*bury Guardian.* After the Chairman had left, the lights of the room became dim with smoke, so that it seemed as if the tobacco was burning itself up a second time in the gas flames. Complaints, ever becoming louder, were heard against the price and quality of the caterer's whiskey, and many of the guests both amused and revenged themselves by throwing empty bottles at one another's legs underneath the table. Roars of laughter shook the Town Hall, attracting the attention of people outside. Merriment and horse-play were in command. The waiters, refusing to wait, retired to the cloak-room with a dozen bottles of champagne, and soon could not have waited even had they been willing. In order to prevent the destruction of all the glass and crockery (hired for the evening) the caterer was obliged to turn off the gas at the main, and to hide himself at the foot of the Assembly Room stairs, behind a bust of the Prince Consort.

The Mayor, meanwhile, was in bed, receiving spoon-food from his mother.

## XIV

Amid the controversies and festivities of mayor-making, Trowbury had begun to take the Holy Mountain for granted—to talk about it rather than think about it. The accounts in the *Halfpenny Press* sufficed the town's curiosity as to the progress of it, if they did not suffice the persons locally concerned, and the Holy Mountain was promoted to the position of a sure thing.

But the day after the mayoral banquet Mr. Trotman, urged thereto by biliousness and a growing distrust of his friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, began to turn over in his own mind the little he really knew about the affair, and to determine what steps he should take to get all

his five fingers into the pie. He felt that the Director of the *Halfpenny Press* was neglecting him somewhat, and he doubted—yes, he did doubt—if Sir Pushcott's brief dictated letters to Castle Street had contained the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Mrs. Trotman was even more doubtful than her husband. Alec, she said, meaning his parents, had been consulted in nothing. Nothing! Alec had not even received any money, except the sum in advance which Mr. Trotman had placed to his own account in the bank, for safety's sake.

What had been happening was this: As soon as it became known that Alexander Trotman would receive a lease of the Holy Mountain, on condition that it was used for religious purposes, a Provisional Committee, with the Archbishop of All the Empire at the head of it, was formed under the auspices of the *Halfpenny Press*. The Provisional Committee was informed, through Sir Pushcott Bingley, that it could enter into possession at Michaelmas. In order to safeguard itself, in case sufficient support was not forthcoming, the Provisional Committee entered into a preliminary six months' tenancy, at a high rental, but terminable by either side at the close of that period. What they did not foresee was that, in law, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: they assumed that the Holy Mountain was bound by Act of Parliament to be used for their religious purposes. Mr. Trotman certainly thought that in the matter of tenancy they had taken a rise out of Sir Pushcott Bingley. And so, in the back of their minds, did they.

An immediate appeal, backed by great names, was issued for money with which to build upon the Holy Mountain a grand Imperial Temple. The contract was given to a syndicate which undertook to build in six months the Temple complete—a syndicate, as it turned out, financed by Americans.

At Michaelmas the Provisional Committee, then entering into possession, reconstituted itself into a Permanent Committee, made up just the same as before, except that a few titled and politically prominent men were co-opted, in order to give it tone and influence. At noon precisely, on Michaelmas Day, the American contractors began bundling their machinery to the top of the Holy Mountain. Building started forthwith. No time to waste in laying ceremonial foundation stones ! Religion was become business-like, practical.

So far, the arrangements had worked fairly smoothly. Controversy had become difficult since the amalgamation of all the important daily newspapers into three groups—the *Halfpenny Press*, the *Penny Press*, and the *Times*. Each group required time in which to consider what would be its most profitable policy.

When, however, the sects found that something definite was really afoot—that building had positively commenced—they were all seized with a great fear of being left out in the cold, and with an active determination to see that their rights were respected. In default of proper outlets for controversy, a huge network of intrigues grew up. London buzzed with clerics of all denominations ; talking, writing, preaching, interviewing, and holding meetings of hastily formed mutual-admiration societies. The Permanent Committee spent half its day in listening to deputations, each of which was told that its contention would be most carefully considered. So careful was the consideration that it never came to a conclusion, and nothing at all happened ; and the sects, like the heathen of old, raged furiously together. Building on the Holy Mountain proceeded with feverish energy. The sects looked upon the white stucco temple, raising itself, like a huge growing animal, from a chaos of black hooting machinery, and they could not contain themselves for rage, jealousy and curiosity.

Yet it seemed as if the whole Press, except the religious journals, was conspiring to muzzle the multitude, for it declined, quite silently—‘in the public interest’—to publish any more correspondence, and though thousands of letters must have been written, not one on the subject was published in columns devoted to *The Editor's Post-bag*.

Then a prominent nonconformist divine began pamphleteering. His action was hailed as a discovery; himself as a saviour. London fluttered and fluttered with pamphlets. The newspaper groups were at last compelled to decide definitely on their policies. The *Penny Press*, with its large circulation among old maids, public-houses and retired tradesmen, was obliged to support the Church. Since the Holy Mountain, though leased temporarily, was national property, it was only right, said the *Penny Press*, that its chief benefits should accrue to the National Church. Other denominations would, of course, be allowed a share; on sufferance be it understood; for the Church of England had never shown herself intolerant. But they would naturally have to conform to Church usage and ceremonial—a line they would doubtless be quite willing to take when they found there was something to be gained by it.

The *Times*, sitting on the fence of unquestionable superiority, talked of the religious revival as one of the most interesting phenomena of modern times. The *Halfpenny Press* performed still more marvellous feats of standing on the fence, and, so to speak, dancing a jig there. It declared for unsectarianism, or rather for multi-sectarianism, being of the opinion that every form of religion should receive English justice. When the Pope applied, through the German Government, for a Catholic side-chapel in the Imperial Temple, the *Halfpenny Press* declared that such

a reasonable demand from such an exalted quarter, presented through such an Imperial nation, should at once be granted. When the Mormons, following suit, asked, through the American Ambassador, for seats in the Imperial Temple, the *Halfpenny Press* considered that the Mormons should be given an opportunity of entering into the confraternity of Christians, provided they pledged themselves neither to preach polygamy nor to outrage the morals of the women of England, and provided the American Ambassador became surety for their good behaviour in these respects. Thus the *Halfpenny Press* very wisely left the Permanent Committee to take the brunt of all the offence that was bound to be given, all the intolerance that had to be exercised. And when, furthermore, the Permanent Committee declined to treat with the Buddhists, Sir Pushcott's journal regretted the refusal as decidedly ungraceful ; for Buddhism approached very near to Christianity, and was besides the national religion of our gallant allies, the Japanese.

In fine, the *Halfpenny Press* posed successfully as the only tolerant, charitable, sensible, reasonable, practical, diplomatic, scientific, perspicacious, English, British, imperial, national, religious, logical, and Christian spokesman in the matter. It was the lid of a seething pot that bubbled and boiled, and did no more. Every day it published a panoramic photograph of the Temple works. Across two paper pages, its readers saw the steel girders rise, saw the workmen clustering upon the framework, the concrete slabs fixed to the steel, and the plaster mouldings, imported from abroad, placed in position outside. By fixing the successive pictures in a special apparatus, sold on the instalment system, a cinematographic view of the building of the Imperial Temple could be seen—the Imperial Temple built in two minutes !

The Permanent Committee traversed the woods of perplexity. They decided that the Temple could not properly be consecrated, since so many sects were to worship in it. They became hopelessly involved in questions of precedence; to settle which an attempt was made to determine the date of founding of each sect. They altered repeatedly the arrangements for the opening ceremonial. A flippant journalist dubbed the Holy Mountain and its Temple *The Religious Exhibition*, and that is indeed what each compromise tended more and more to make it. The lightly uttered nickname stuck. Heads began to shake. "I told you so!" was getting ready to leap from thousands of tongues.

## XV

By the beginning of March, the half-finished Imperial Temple, gaunt and naked, had arisen over London. It was, statisticians said, one and a half times as large as St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey put together, and, thanks to the triumphs of modern architectural engineering, it was costing less by a half to build than either of the older churches it dwarfed. Owing to the shape of the Holy Mountain, it was constructed in the form of an octagon, with two of its opposite sides, the northern and the southern, much elongated. Above it was a large dome, still, on March 1, unfinished—a skeleton dome of rusty-red steel girders. On March 5, a great golden cross was placed in position on the top of the dome, but, following urgent representations from some of the nonconformist sects, and for the sake of peace, the Permanent Committee had the golden cross removed on March 9, to be replaced by an angel with wings. For similar reasons, the Committee felt it ad-

visable to refuse the offer of a body of Royal Academicians and wealthy High Churchmen, who wished, at their own expense, to decorate the interior with frescoes of the authentic miracles recorded in the three synoptic Gospels.

The unfortunate Committee would have been glad enough to say to the protesting denominations, "If you don't like it, stay away." But tickets were already issued ; to each sect a large block of seats ; and empty floor-space in the temple could on no account be risked. Revivalism, the Committee knew, flourishes best in a crowded building and a mephitic atmosphere.

The Grand United Opening Ceremony was fixed for March 25, the festival of the Annunciation.

Shortly before that date, the Trotmans finally decided to stay at home. A gentleman most patriarchal in appearance and business-like in speech—the yellow hairs of his long white beard corresponded in tint with the gold rims of his large spectacles, and his tongue went nineteen to the dozen—introduced himself at Castle Street as Archdeacon of the sect called Watchers, who, he said, watched and prayed for the Second Advent and possessed a divine apprehension of its coming. He offered to prove that Alec was indeed the Messiah, and when Mr. Trotman inquired what benefit that might be to his son, the Mayor of Trowbury, the Archdeacon of the Watchers took refuge in prophecy. He declared that by his prophetic faculty he also knew Alec to be in love. (Which Mrs. Trotman, on her part, felt was true enough.) And he added that the Messiahship would be made manifest, and the Millennium proclaimed, at the Grand United Opening of the Imperial Temple on the Holy Mountain. Neither Alec nor his father believed in the prophetic patriarch ; but yet nevertheless, notwithstanding . . . Wonderful things *had* happened. The old man spoke like a prophet, semi-articulately and

wildly and with conviction, and he had a prophetic presence. They showed him out very politely (Mr. Trotman mentioned that he was a magistrate), and, discretion being the better part of piety, they decided that it would be better for Alec's health if, on the great day, Alec himself stayed quietly at home.

On March 25, which was sunny and spring-like, so that voices in the streets seemed to sound clearer and plainer, half London rattled out to Acton, where the Imperial Temple stood—new, rain-washed and white—upon the summit of the Holy Mountain. The extension of the tube railway was unfinished, but that only made the better business for cabs, trams, and motor buses. Editions of the *Halfpenny Press* sold themselves by bundles along the route from the City. From the *Halfpenny Press* the assembling multitude learned that it was indeed assembling, and in countless numbers. It was as if you should purchase a newspaper to be informed that you were purchasing it, and such pleasing, such inimitable enterprise was much praised.

Admission to the interior of the Imperial Temple was by ticket only. Everyone, however, who wished, might go upon the slopes of the Holy Mountain by payment of one shilling towards the Building Debt and the Maintenance Fund. They would at least be able to see the Archbishop of All the Empire when he mounted to the dome of the Temple, after the Grand United Opening Ceremony, to bestow his episcopal benediction upon the multitude, upon London, upon England, upon the Empire.

It was noticed that the sunshine, following a night-frost and early morning's rainfall, had already caused some of the symbolic plaster to peel off the cornice of the temple.

All the morning the turnstiles at the foot of the Holy Mountain creaked and clanked. All the morning were

heard the cries of hawkers, offering for sale the only authentic programmes, the only authentic hymns, the only authentic prayers ; picture postcards of the Temple within and without, around and about ; of the Holy Mountain, and of Alexander Trotman—Alexander Trotman's last photo, Alexander Trotman as a byby, Alexander Trotman in 'is mayor's robes, Alexander Trotman an' 'is gal (a faked photograph in which the place of Julia was taken by a fourth-rate actress), and Alexander Trotman a-fiyntin' orf the 'Oly Mounting. Acton post office was besieged, and only a strong draft of police prevented its being wrecked when the stock of halfpenny stamps ran out.

About eleven o'clock, the various bodies of ticket holding sects, with their banners, marched up the slope of the Holy Mountain and in at the side-doors of the Temple. Since most of the sectarians were in pietistic black coats and very various top-hats, some astonishment was caused by the arrival of a large contingent wearing everyday clothes and red ties. A rumour spread that it was the Mormons. Many of the nonconformists who had derived great pleasure from the refusal of the Catholics to be present at the Grand United Opening Ceremony, were not a little disgusted, and expressed themselves not a little bitterly and loudly, when, on looking into the side-chapel assigned to the Catholics, they saw there a large array of polychrome saints and Holy Families, placed on sale by a firm of monumental sculptors named Isaac Cohen & Co.

Just before noon, when the high interior of the Temple seemed to buzz with voices, it was rumoured that, owing to a cold, the King was unable (or unwilling) to be present ; had never intended to be present, in fact.

At noon punctually, the Archbishop of all the Empire arrived in his motor car at the foot of the Holy Mountain, and went into a galvanised-iron vestry, or robing shed.

Then, vested in a brilliant cope and mitre, preceded by his chaplain with the pastoral staff, and followed by his clergy, he ascended the slope. He stopped from time to time, it was observed, as if to take breath. Behind the heads of the Church walked the leading ministers of all the denominations represented within the Temple. When the Archbishop came to a halt on the slope, they had all to halt too, which they did badly ; and very undignified they looked.

Meanwhile, the congregation within had with the greatest difficulty been induced to sing all the same hymn. While the Archbishop and clergy and ministers were marching up the wide central aisle, it seemed even as if everything was going lustily and well ; as if the service would be really congregational, the religious devotion of a nation. But when the Archbishop intoned a strictly reverent prayer, it became evident to the worldlier of those present that this sort of thing would never do for sightseers and people accustomed to the luxuriant eloquence of revivalism. The congregation began chattering, like inattentive schoolboys. The men in red ties, having declined to kneel, now stood bolt upright, awaiting a sign from their leaders. They were, in fact, enthusiasts of the secularist, socialist, and labour parties, and had received their tickets treacherously from two jealous denominations which had applied for tickets in disproportion to their size, and, not getting so many, had changed their minds about being present. The red-tied men laughed and talked with a disdainful loudness among themselves, and on the stewards remonstrating with them, they broke into a defiant shout of, "Down with the priests ! Down with capitalism ! Down with the Church ! An end to mockery !

"Down with it !  
Down with it !  
E-ven to the grou-ound !"

This last they sang with magnificent solidity to the plain Gregorian chant.

Shouts arose from all parts of the great building ; a tremendous snarl. Isolated fights began. The congregation swayed to and fro, the temporary pews with them. There was a panic. All who were able to do so made a rush for the doors. The Archbishop and his suite retired through a small door at the east end of the Temple, and, with a strong escort of police, they made their way back from the Holy Mountain to the City.

The congregation in its thousands pressed from all the doors of the building like outraged bees from an apiary. Quicker almost than by word of mouth the news spread down the slopes that the Grand United Opening Ceremony had been a failure ; that the Archbishop was gone again ; that the multitude was cheated of its benediction and its spectacle. Soon the noise resembled the clamour of birds preparing for migration. The crowd from the Temple pressed downwards ; the crowd from below pressed up : the slope was, as it were, a monstrous carpet, spotted white with faces—dragged backwards and forwards, blown up by the wind, rucked and undulated. Turves were pulled up and thrown at the Temple, flints as well. By the time the mounted police came up in force the windows of the Temple were all smashed, the floor of it littered with earth, and its new white plaster-walls splashed with blobs of dirt.

Not till half-past three in the afternoon was the Holy Mountain totally clear of people and in undisputed possession of the police.

The head-lines of the *Evening Press*, the newspaper placards, and the raucous newsboys announced one and the same thing :

#### THE GRAND FIASCO !

Some called it, “The Grand United Fiasco.”

In Acton and along the Uxbridge Road, all except the eating and drinking shops put up their shutters. Men went about, nosing like rats, and asking breathlessly : “ Is it true—they’ve read the Riot Act ? ”

## XVI

Sir Pushcott Bingley, like the King, did not personally attend the Grand United Opening Ceremony of the Imperial Temple. He remained at the real head of affairs, in that Palace of Telephones, the *Halfpenny Press* Buildings. With him was John Fulton, the Half-penny Pressman that Trowbury knew, now promoted to the position of Holy Mountain secretary, in place of a more talented young man about whom pressmen whispered in Fleet Street, “ Bled out ! ”

Sir Pushcott was anxious, not about ultimate success, for that he scarcely doubted, but about the precise means by which he and circumstances were to achieve it. Whilst the Halfpenny Pressman, hearing only the tittering echo of the telephonic voices from the Holy Mountain, watched his chief receiving news from minute to minute, watched the varying expressions on his chief’s face, yet remained in ignorance of the great events which were known in the very same room, he became very nervous and strung up. He felt ready to burst, to cry. He realised that there is an obverse side to promotion. When Sir Pushcott put down the receiver, saying, “ Good ! I hoped so ! ” poor John Fulton nearly jumped out of his chair, and shouted, “ Yes, sir ! ” at the top of his voice, as if his chief had been at the far end of the wires, among the stirring events.

Sir Pushcott meditated a few moments, then began swiftly and surely to dictate to his subordinates. That day's *Evening Press* was to startle the nation ; next morning's *Halfpenny Press* was to strike vigorously the note of Sir Pushcott's policy. He was well satisfied. He left his office repeating to himself, as he always did, a selection of proverbs which praised himself retrospectively. "Look before you leap" was one of them. "Everything comes to him who knows how to wait" was another.

## XVII

Between seven and eight o'clock that same evening, Mr. Trotman heard a newspaper boy running down Castle Street. "*Evening Press ! Spechul edition !* The grand Fyasco ! To-day's ceremony on the 'Oly Mountain ! *Evening Press ! Grand United Fyasco !*"

The bell of the Famous Grocery tinkled, the knocker banged. "Spechul edition. Yer y're, sir. Take two ?"

Mr. Trotman with two copies returned to his arm-chair. He read. He read again. He looked at the other copy as if it might be different. Alec and his mother came into the room. Something was very wrong.

"Look at this, Alec ! If we'd been there like I wanted to . . . What's the good of your being Mayor now ? Simply extra expense for nothing."

Mr. Trotman worked himself into a temper with his son. Mrs. Trotman drew Alec to her, and defended him from the father who for some time continued to express himself scenically. At last, the ex-Mayor threw himself back in his arm-chair with a fervent "Good Lord !" and read the *Evening Press* a third time.

"Why doesn't Sir Pushcott wire or send?" he asked rhetorically. "It's his duty, nothing more or less. It's the bishops have done it. Those confounded black crows got no idea of business! There's a debt on the Parish Room now. First they spend the money, and then they ask for the money, because they've spent it. The Church wants business men in it. Why doesn't Sir Pushcott look after the thing himself, or else let me look after it? It's *his* fault!"

Mrs. Trotman tried to oil the troubled waters. "I think Sir Pushcott has treated us very badly," she said.

Alec spoke finally. "Sir Pushcott's all right," he said. "*He* knows what he's about."

"Rot!" his father exploded.

Mr. Trotman settled himself down to a good bout of self-pity. Those many acquaintances who thought they'd just look in at the Famous Grocery to sympathise and to learn the latest authentic news, all those he showed to the door with suppressed insult. Alec, caring little for the Holy Mountain except as a means to an end, yearned with a most peculiar intensity for his motherly Julia, and could nowise be comforted by his mother's ministrations.

Unhappy the house of Trotman that night!

With next morning's *Halfpenny Press*, however, their spirits revived a little. The causes of the Grand United Fiasco were numbered and set in a column.

1. Bad organisation.
2. Railway unreadiness.
3. Absence of H.M. the King.
4. Absence of Mr. Alexander Trotman.
5. Presence of the Secularists.
6. Perpetual demands for money.
7. Traffic disorganisation.
8. Motor bus disasters.

9. Unattractiveness of the ceremony.
10. Ignorance of how to manage crowds.
11. Cowardice of the promoters.
12. Lack of the true Revival Spirit.
13. Religious intolerance.

Thus did the *Halfpenny Press* place the burden of the blame on convenient shoulders. The Permanent Committee (short biographies of its members on another page) were compared unfavourably with the Welsh and American revivalists. In accepting the Holy Mountain from Mr. Alexander Trotman they had incurred a vast, an imperial, responsibility. On that account they had collected large sums of money. Where was it now ? They had come to total failure. The Holy Mountain with its Imperial Temple had been contemptuously called the Religious Exhibition. As an exhibition, even, it had failed. Something was wrong somewhere—grave inefficiency. Since the religious bodies had shown themselves so disunited, so lacking in the essential Spirit of Christianity, let the Holy Mountain be devoted to the cause of humanity. Let religious mockery cease. Let the sects go each to its little church or chapel. They had had their divinely appointed opportunity ; they had had this miracle ; and they had been found wanting. It was now the turn of the people, whom the un-Christian denominations had presumed to teach.

Mr. Trotman was sure he smelt a rat. He even expressed the opinion—in the privacy of the Famous Grocery—that Sir Pushcott was up to one of his tricks. And when, a day or two later, he read that Mr. Alexander Trotman, according to the terms of the sub-tenancy, would call on the Permanent Committee to quit the Holy Mountain at the end of April, he was less surprised at the news than at Sir Pushcott's high-handedness in

giving the Permanent Committee notice to quit in the name of Mr. Alexander Trotman, without reference to the said Mr. Alexander Trotman—that is, to his father.

On a business memorandum form he wrote thus:—

“THE FAMOUS GROCERY ESTABLISHMENT,  
“TROWBURY,  
“WILTS,  
“*April 1.*

“DEAR SIR PUSHCOTT,

“It has been brought to my notice that you have given the Permanent Committee notice to quit the Holy Mountain in the name of my son, the Mayor of Trowbury. It appears to me that that was the business-like thing to do, but I beg to take exception to your doing it without consulting my son or myself. Such a procedure appears high-handed and unbusiness-like to

“Your obedient servant,  
“JAMES TROTMAN.”

By return of post Mr. Trotman received the reply following:—

“HALFPENNY PRESS’ BUILDINGS,  
“(DIRECTION DEPT.),  
“LONDON, E.C.,  
“*April 2.*

“DEAR SIR,

“Sir Pushcott Bingley desires me to beg you—

“(1) To refer to your copy of the Agreement between your son and Sir Pushcott Bingley, duly and freely signed by your son, in your presence.

“(2) To address all inquiries thereon to Sir Pushcott Bingley’s solicitors, Messrs. Brown, Smith, Pyne, and Williams, of Chancery Lane.

" (3) To kindly bear in mind that business is business, and time money.

" Sir Pushcott Bingley will be glad if Mr. Alexander Trotman will sign and return immediately by registered post the enclosed document.

" Yours very faithfully,

" For Sir Pushcott Bingley,

" JOHN FULTON.

(*Secy.*) "

The enclosed document was the above-mentioned formal notice to quit. Nothing could be done except sign it; but whether the consternation of the Trotmans, on receiving the above letter, was greater or less than the consternation of the sectarians, cannot be accurately gauged. In the latter quantity was predominant, in the former, quality. Common to both was a defiance that knew not how to express itself.

BOOK IV



## I

“RETURN again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London Town !”

That story, by whomsoever carelessly made, is as lasting a fact as London itself. It is our national pantomime, the tinsel wherewith we decorate our death-trap. Like Whittington and his cat (Miss Starkey had many feline points) did Julia and her friend follow Bow Bells up the wind. Precisely what end they had in their minds, who knows ? At least, they were proof against the menace of the paper-patched tenement houses on the way in towards Paddington station. They had day-dreams of bettering themselves. With the remainder of her savings in her reticule—a few sovereigns and one banknote—Julia was bent on finding employment in her old shop at Acton. Miss Starkey’s idea was less definite. Perhaps a barmaid’s place. Perhaps . . . Well, the least said, soonest mended. At all events, she was fiercely, desperately determined to have a good time. “Is that London ?” she asked when they passed through Reading, Slough, Southall, Ealing. Expresses whizzing by westwards made her laugh aloud. Julia behaved in what she believed to be a proper public manner. It was merciful that these two young women were too homeless, too irrational to ask each other, “And after that—what then ?”

A porter addressed Miss Starkey (not Julia) as “My dear !”—so subtle are the speechless communications of mankind. Julia, angered almost beyond bearing

and feeling more than ever the uncertainty of her foot-hold in the world, decided to go straight out from Paddington to Acton by train. She feared to face London. At Acton station they left their luggage—mainly contained in bulging basket-work—at the cloak-room, tidied themselves in the ladies' waiting-room, and set out on foot for the Uxbridge Road. The whirl and rush of the city seemed to grip Julia less when she was afoot.

"All London isn't like this," remarked Miss Starkey with conviction.

"No, dear," said Julia. Nothing more.

But a surprise awaited them. Into all her mental pictures of Acton Julia had forgotten to insert the Holy Mountain.

There it was, however. She saw it; she could not help seeing it; saw the chalky scars in its side, old quarries where Wiltshire yokels had worked; and thought she detected the path by which she and Alec had climbed up from Mrs. Parfitt's, though that path had long since been obliterated. It was uncanny. She shivered. It was like meeting an old friend to find him dead or insane. She thought with intensity of Alec. She seemed to smell the smell of the Down air as it had been on *that* evening. She ran her eyes from the paling and galvanised pay-huts at the bottom to the battered Imperial Temple at the top. Its smashed windows were like eye-sockets lacking eyes.

But it was the size of it that impressed Miss Starkey. "My word, what a sky-scraper the Temple is!" she exclaimed.

"D'you think so?" said Julia. She had rather it had remained the site of her love's fading dream, as the song calls it. When a man dies, we say, "Poor So-and-so!" and that's an end of it if we are sincere. Poor Julia would have wished the same. Her earth had

dropped beneath her ; her heavens had drawn away from her ; and she was left like a marionette, swinging in mid-air.

She found her old employer groaning with an attack of lumbago ; no longer the sleek *Kindly step this way, madam* ; but a grovelling jerking piece of wreckage, bemoaning in a dim back room the loss of trade which had resulted from one of those ceaseless shiftings of the classes and masses which happen so suddenly in the suburbs of a great city. He was genuinely sorry he could not give her a berth, for Julia was one of those people whom one likes to meet again. He was, he said, not employing her sort of young lady nowadays. He was trying to retrieve his business by an alteration in its character from selectness to cheapness, from good customers to the many, and so far, though the good customers had gone, the many had not come. Propped on two chairs, beside a pile of bills and letters that had pictures of fashions upon them, he told Julia pitifully that he had been compelled to begin ticketing the goods in his window. The Holy Mountain had driven all the smart people away from Acton. From a residential suburb, it had become a sort of excursion pleasure garden—a perfect bear-garden. He was sorry ; he would have asked her to dinner with himself and his wife, had he not become a vegetarian in the hope of curing his lumbago. Cheaper, too ! It took him just there, in the small of the back. . . . “ Ough, ah ! ah !—Good morning, Miss Jepp. If you should want another testimonial . . . Very pleased to. Good. . . . Ough ! ah ! ah ! ”

Julia took the bad news to Miss Starkey, who had been waiting at a tea-shop. “ He says the Holy Mountain’s been and spoilt his trade.”

“ It wouldn’t have spoilt *my* trade, if I’d been him,” said Miss Starkey.

Nor would it, probably. Lack of ability, lack of push, was not one of her failings. She had dropped off her baby, when it became an inconvenience, like a cicatrice from a healed-up wound. "We must go into lodgings," she said now, without the least hesitation.

"Yes, I s'pose we must," said Julia. She had hoped by working at the draper's to keep herself, and her friend as well if necessary ; possibly to get Miss Starkey into the draper's cash bureau.

At the end of a tiring day on foot and in tramcars, they found a half-furnished room in a street off Shepherd's Bush, in a meanly respectable street frequented by pedestrians as a short cut, but hardly ever entered by any vehicle other than a hawker's.

They fetched their luggage, and at the nearest shop bought crockery enough to rub along with. Their boxes and baskets partially unpacked, they spent the evening over tea and bread and butter and biscuits before a ninepenny fire in a rusty grate. Vermin made them feel more homeless and helpless than ever. For some time almost their only amusement was the couple in a room opposite theirs on the other side of the street. All day long, the woman, a stout solemn creature in black, sat sewing at her window, occasionally craning her neck the better to observe someone in the street. But in the evening her man returned from work. He would chuck her under the chin and hit her playfully on the breasts, and sometimes he would catch hold of her nose and drag her round the room. Yet apart they were the staidest of people. Julia caught herself envying that woman. It was with more than laughter that she looked at the weighty middle-aged couple advancing, retreating, pirouetting about their one small room ; watched their ample shadows on the blind. She greatly wondered in what words they

spoke to one another ; and though Miss Starkey called it the Punch and Judy Show, Julia felt miserably the fact that the middle-aged couple had a home and each other. She watched them greedily, wishing the while that she was back in the Emporium, among the assistants and faces she knew — wished it, oh how much !

She sought work half-heartedly, and ended by taking in sewing from her old employer at Acton, without realising that she was among the sweated—blouses of her own design to be made for ninepence each and then ticketed in the Acton window as *Direct from Paris*, 8s. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. *cheap*. A subtle form of sweating it was, in that it was sauced with pride of design, for Julia was something of an artist at her trade. Secure of bread and butter and tea, she sat at her window sewing, and welcomed Miss Starkey with a smile and food when that more energetic young woman returned daily from her explorations in London.

Quite soon Miss Starkey began adding money to the household purse. She had found, so she said, a 'sit' in a West End bar during the rush time. That is to say, a very nice gentleman had found it for her. Julia, being glad, designed and made her a couple of charming blouses.

Then Miss Starkey began staying away at night. The way was far, she explained ; she left work late, and the other young lady allowed her to share a bedroom. She had hopes, indeed, of being taken on as a full-timer.

The two girls took a newspaper, of course—the *Half-penny Press*, and sometimes even the *Penny Press* too. But journalism, since its attainment of so high a pitch of decorativeness, had lost much of its reality ; in aping realism it had ceased to be real ; for we can no more digest a surfeit of news than a surfeit of food, and we easily become lookers-on at the events of the world

instead of participators in them. Julia and Miss Starkey read the newspapers to each other, sitting primly because they could not sit otherwise on their two wooden chairs. They knew the news was more or less true, yet did not feel its truth. The world was a halfpenny peep-show to them. Even the columns dealing with the agitation which circled around and about Alexander Trotman and his Holy Mountain, seemed to them merely so much fiction—a pleasant fiction and an exciting, but a shadow-show, admission one halfpenny. Julia never fully succeeded in identifying the Alexander Trotman and the Holy Mountain of the Press with the Alec and the Ramshorn Hill that she knew so well.

She did not realise, for instance, what had really happened, and what was likely to happen, when she read that the Holy Mountain had been leased by Mr. Trotman to the Pro Bono Publico Co. Ltd., and that it would by them be opened in three months as a People's Pleasure Ground, which—having regard to its natural advantages, the improvements which would be carried out, and the attractive enterprise of the Pro Bono Publico Co. Ltd.—must rival every pleasure centre in the world. She was surprised that the Holy Mountain and the Imperial Temple should be let as a pleasure ground after usage for religious purposes, and she wondered if the Temple would be taken down—merely that.

She was therefore shocked when one afternoon Miss Starkey returned to their lodging, flushed, dishevelled, and brimming over with news :

“ I say, Julie, you did ought to have been in town this morning. There's such a row on over Alec Trotman's Mountain. No end of a hullabaloo ! The whole of Oxford Street was held up quarter of a mile before I got to the Circus—simply a pack of buses, and cabs,

and motors, and carts, like sardines in a box. I heard people saying they'd never seen anything like it. I wonder the bobbies didn't move them on. When I got to the Circus after such a push and scramble, there was a set of white-haired old parsons going down Regent Street with a band playing hymn tunes—*Onward Christian Soldiers*, I think 'twas—and behind them there was a whole long procession of men in black coats and white ties and all sorts of clergymen walking beside them. Their singing sounded like cats in the next street. They all looked as solemn as if they were going to a funeral. And they carried a lot of banners with paintings on them, worked on silk, and a lot of placards on sticks—you never saw such a thing. Nobody could cross the street except when a real swell came along, and then the bobbies stopped the procession a minute, and on it went again, like black water running down a gutter. They had big posters, Julie, with simply awful likenesses of Alec Trotman on them, and *Down with the traitors to God*, and *God and His Holy Mountain*, or *Hill of Sion*—I forget which,—and *What would Jesus have done?* and *To give a Thing and take a Thing Makes it the Devil's Plaything*, and *How long, O Lord, how long!* I can't tell you all of them. You never saw such a sight. Now and then they started cheering. The cheer came up Regent Street, swelled big in the Circus, and fizzled out up Langham Place. The policemen and everyone looked at them as if they were children playing at processions—you know. And they kept on coming to the Circus as if there wasn't never going to be any end to them. They all looked as soapy as a parson when someone says 'Damn.' I felt as if I should like to stick pins into the seat of their trousers to make 'em jump. They had ever so many likenesses of Alec—none of 'em flattering, I must say. I stood and watched them for, I should think, three-quarters of an hour, and

then I asked a policeman nicely to slip me across, and he did, and there was just the same crush the other side of the Circus—half London held up for a blooming procession of parsons. . . . Hark ! That's the postman, isn't it ? ”

Post was Julie's one excitement in London, apart from the chronic painful excitement of being there at all. As she had told Alec on Ramshorn Hill, she was not strong enough to live in a murky city. London soon destroyed her freshness ; made her plumpness look like fat. But now, taking the letter from Miss Starkey's hand, she looked quite young and pretty for the moment. “ It's Mrs. Clinch's writing ! ” she exclaimed.

The letter contained a roundabout statement to the effect that Mrs. Clinch had found no one to fill Julia's place in the Emporium ; that one dressmaker had been useless and another had run away in debt ; that customers were grumbling and Mr. Clinch was grumbling too ; that they had lost the custom of a county family ; that Julia had always known how to suit Trowbury taste ; that Mrs. Clinch would be so thankful if she would forgive and forget and return ; and finally that Mr. Clinch would be glad to agree to a slight increase in salary. Julia knew what life at the Emporium was like. She pitied the well-meaning ineffectual Mrs. Clinch, whom she had many times protected from the redoubtable draper, and comforted after an upset. The protective motherly spirit that was so strong in her, the feeling of loneliness that, as it were, soaked her through, had brought her to a conclusion some time before she asked Miss Starkey : “ What *shall* I do now, Edie ? ”

“ Why, you're set up again, Julie. More pay, too. And Trowbury air always did suit you.”

“ But you, Edie ? ”

“ Oh, I'm all right. I shall stay here, dear. *I* can take care of myself.”

"But the baby. . . ."

"Bother the baby!"

"Edie!"

"Poor little thing! I'm no mother to it, am I, Julie? You'll go over and look at it sometimes, won't you, Julie?" Miss Starkey spoke almost wistfully.

"Nobody else but you can be its mother to the child," said Julia. She almost wished it had been her own.

"Well, *I* can't—that's a sure thing. I know you'll keep an eye on it, dear; and old Nurse Parfitt. . . . I'll send her down some cash."

"It's not that. . . ."

"Anyhow, I'm *not* coming. I can't. How *can* I now? Why, I'm turned out of Trowbury—twenty-four hours to clear out in!"

Julia was surprised by an outburst of weeping. "How *can* I? Oh, how *can* I?" Miss Starkey kept on asking. Then, with a rapidity astounding to a more coherent nature, like Julia's, she got up, dried her eyes, washed her face, passed Julia's comb through her hair, scented a clean handkerchief, and said with decision: "You go, dear, and I stay, and that's the end of that."

Julia said, "Very well, dear."

Three days, and she was back again at Trowbury with Mrs. Clinch dropping tears upon the shoulder-strap of a new blouse bought in Oxford Street for the occasion.

That was the only time Julia went into the city.

## II

When the *Halfpenny Press*, containing news of the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate, had arrived in Trowbury, slight differences in expression again masked a remark-

able unanimity in opinion. "Well, I'm damn'd!" observed the men who had some pretences to education ; whilst the less educated said with a more philosophical tranquillity, "Well, I be damn'd." The ladies and women meant exactly the same when they exclaimed on all sides, "Good gracious!—What a shame!—Well, I never!—Dear me!—Deary me!—Who'd ha' thought it!"

Mr. Trotman looked into the paper, told Mrs. Trotman to show it to the Mayor when he came in, and left the house. (He was beginning now to use the term Mayor with something like derision in the privacy of the Famous Grocery Establishment.) On his way to the Blue Boar he bought copies of the *Penny Press* and the *Times*, peeped into them, but was no further informed ; for the *Halfpenny Press* had been able to steal a march on its more expensive contemporaries, so that news of the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate was its own exclusively.

Miss Miles, the manageress, was standing in the shadowy depths of the bar, herself reading the *Halfpenny Press*. The gaslight, passing through a glass brandy-keg, made a yellow band across her face. For a moment she did not notice the ex-Mayor. Then, on his smiting the counter bell, she looked up :

"Oh. . . ."

"Small Scotch, please."

"What a shame!" said Miss Miles, holding out the paper towards Mr. Trotman. "What does it mean? Now please tell me. *You* ought to know."

"What does *what* mean?"

"Why, this about the Holy Mountain."

Hardly knowing himself, Mr. Trotman gained time by asking, "What do *you* think it means?"

"I call it a great shame. That's what *I* think."

Miss Miles poured out the whiskey with great dignity,

being truly indignant. Women in the bars of country towns have no chance of any society except they become religious. Only if they attend church with conspicuous regularity, and make the acquaintance of the clergyman, who is usually not reluctant to attend to his semi-respectable, brightly spoken, worldly-wise sisters after a course of the stodgy wives and daughters of the highly respectable,—only then will they be talked to at the lych-gate, be allowed to make themselves useful at charitable entertainments, and even (sometimes) be invited out to tea and supper. Miss Miles was not ungrateful to her religious sponsors. She disapproved, as she felt they would do, of the change in the fortunes of the Holy Mountain. She thought, as everybody else did, that the Trotmans were making a fortune out of it. So she showed her indignation in the usual manner by refusing to converse unnecessarily with Mr. Trotman. She began posting up the day-book, and on the arrival of Miss Cora Sankey she went away.

Mr. Trotman, holding his glass in his hand, was looking meditatively at the bar clock.

"Hullo, Mr. ex-Mayor!" shouted Light in our Darkness. "Is it true they're going to turn your Holy Mountain into a public-house?"

"Public-house. . . ."

"Yes. Public-house. Pro bono *publico*; that's public, isn't it? Eh?"

Mr. Trotman did not know. Indeed, he had gathered only a very hazy notion of the whole matter—what the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate was, what its name meant, what it purposed to do. First Miss Miles, then the Sankey; he felt as if the powers of evil were compassing him round about. When Mr. Ganthorn appeared within the swing-doors, both Mr. Trotman and Miss Sankey turned towards him. The latter's penetrating voice gained the upper hand at once. "I say, Mr. Ganthorn,

does Pro Bono Publico mean public-house ? Mr. Trotman here says it doesn't."

" Pro Bono Publico," said Mr. Ganthorn with mock deliberation. " Pro Bono Publico—a whiskey and soda, please."

" Soda ? "

" A whiskey and soda, please.—Pro Bono Publico is Latin, or used to be in my young days, and means : *pro*, on behalf of ; *bono*, the good ; *publico*, of the public."

" Then it does mean a public-house—you see, Mr. Trotman. I knew I was right."

" It means yourself too, Miss Cora. Your good health. May you never grow less."

" What d'you mean now ? Eh ? "

" I mean that whiskey is pro bono publico, and so is the fair flutterer who dispenses it. How greatly do her charms add to the charms of . . ."

" Get out ! "

" —of mountain dew and aerated waters.—I say, Mr. ex-Mayor, what's this about your Holy Mountain ? "

" How should I know ? " replied Mr. Trotman, with a tug like a stage villain's at his drooping moustache. " Look here, Ganthorn, you had better go'n ask Sir Pushcott Bingley. If you want to know anything, you'd better ask him. As it's no business of yours, you'll enjoy doing so. And Sir Pushcott doesn't take kindly to questions, I can tell you. He'll be *your* match, anyhow. Nobody minds their own business in Trowbury. You're always making fun of everything. 'Tisn't right and proper. Some of us have to be serious sometimes. I might have told you, but I shan't now. I'm sick of it. Sick ! You're always on the Twit, Twit, Twit. . . ."

Mr. Trotman went home to relieve the tension of his intellects over the misdeeds of one of his female clerks :

she cut the cheeses so wastefully. As he went out of the Blue Boar porch he heard Ganthorn and Miss Sankey singing within :

“Twit, Twit, Twit, Twit, Twitter !  
An’ it’s Twit, Twit, Twit, Twitter ! . . .”

And lastly he heard Miss Sankey’s ringing “HE-He-he-he-he !” It followed him, in his ears, across the Market Square.

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Miss Sankey,” said Ganthorn, “than are dreamt of in our philosophy.”

“What’s that ?”

“Hamlet.”

“I say, who *was* Hamlet ?”

“Mr. Trotman’s uncle.”

“What !”

“He was an author.”

“Oh, do lend me one of his books. I do love reading : don’t you ?”

“Hamlet was a prince of Denmark.”

“Oh, chuck it, Mr. Ganthorn.—Really ?”

“Yes.”

“Honour bright ?”

“I do assure you . . .”

“What a man you are, Mr. Ganthorn !—Good morning, Mr. Clinch.”

The bar seemed to fill up as Mr. Clinch’s figure (small boys declared that his chest had slipped down) advanced solemnly to the counter.

“Seen the paper ?” Mr. Ganthorn asked.

“Damn queer—beg pardon—seems to me . . .”

“Where’s young Trotman all the time ?”

“I’ve heard he drinks when his father’s back’s turned.”

“What ?”

"I give it you as I heard it. Anyway, he doesn't seem to have much to do with the Holy Mountain. His mother told my wife the other day that the Holy Mountain hasn't paid his doctor's bills yet."

"I don't believe it ; trust old Trotman for that. He's just gone out in a devil of a temper because I asked him a question or two."

"How many whiskeys did Mr. Trotman have last night, Miss Cora ? "

"A dozen—more or less."

"Well, that's not enough to give *him* a next morning. Must be something else in the wind."

"Yes, but what did he have at home ? Eh ? "

"No telling. I should like to know, though, the bottom of the job."

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe he knows himself.—Well, working men must to work. Good morning."

Mr. Ganthorn gone, the conversation took a lower level. Men who had spent their lives in a triangle, the three corners of which were scandal, cash books, and the parish pump, could not reasonably be expected to scale the financial heights of the Holy Mountain. At all events, Trowbury people never did.

To do him justice, Mr. Trotman himself came nearest to it ; for the man undoubtedly had brains of a sort. He determined to have it out with his distinguished friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, but unfortunately could not decide precisely how he was going to start having it out ; and if matters had come to a head, if he had met the baronet face to face, Sir Pushcott's title would safely have awed the Famous Grocer into obsequious geniality.

Alec was found by his father sitting in the dining-room with a novelette on his knee. Mr. Trotman began by asking his son whether or not he had heard from his Sir

Pushcott Bingley ; went on to demand why he had not heard when he ought to have done so, and blamed him for not writing in order to have heard. "It's your Mountain, isn't it ? The papers say so. If Sir Pushcott does all the work, of course he'll expect all the profit. You ought to have sense enough to see that."

Alec seldom tried to answer his father back. To interrupt a blare from a windbag requires far more controversial vigour than was ever possessed by the mover of the Holy Mountain. And if the windbag is a liar too. . . . What is to be gained by interrupting it, unless it can utterly be burst.

"Why don't you do something ?" Mr. Trotman again asked his son without suggesting what might have been or should be done—for he had nothing to suggest, and that is why he bullied Alec. "You're as soft as a sleepy apple. Here's nothing at all come out of your Holy Mountain except a lot of gab in the newspapers. Why don't you look after it yourself, I say ? You're too damn'd infernally lazy to do anything. You're always mooning round, and that's all you're good for. You've simply made the whole thing an excuse for staying on here when you ought to be at work,—costing me immense sums for your doctors and your food, and your subscriptions, now, as Mayor of Trowbury—after all I've paid for your education ! I won't stand any more of it, I tell you. You shall go to London and work —*work*, d'you hear ?—if Sir Pushcott doesn't send something pretty soon to help pay for your keep."

Mr. Trotman moved towards the door. Grasping the handle, turning it even, his face flushed with pride of speech and his head bobbing emphatically, he brought his most penetrating gun into action : "I see that yellow girl is back at Clinch's. Never ought to be allowed in the town at all. I'll have none of your disgraceful immorality while you're under *my* roof. If I see you with

her once, mind, you go to London by the very next train and have your luggage sent on after you."

Alec looked squarely at his father with his "queer" grey eyes. Then the Famous Grocer, having exhausted both his eloquence and the filthy sediment of his imagination, retired before his son's eyes from the dining-room to the shop.

Alec had stood the siege. As his father's voice rose angrily in the shop, he changed his position in the chair, so as to warm his hands better before the fire, and muttered carelessly to himself, "Confounded old fool! I'll be level with him yet."

He pulled out of his pocket a photograph of Miss Julia Jepp. Tears filled his eyes, not the tears of mere sentiment.

Later in the day, he walked past the Emporium five times defiantly, because he wanted to look at it.

### III

The wave of indignation which arose in England over the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate was of really fine proportions. Religious people were sorrowful enough, but the partisan parasites, who make a hobby of, or a living out of, religion, became nothing short of frenzied. Hence the tragi-comic procession that Miss Starkey saw pass across Oxford Circus. The Church blustered and attempted to dictate, whilst the other sects shrieked from ten thousand pulpits and meetings and denominational journals. The gods were exceeding troubled by their worshippers. What made the whole matter worse—and more amusing—was that nobody knew exactly the intentions of the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate. Faithful believers in the *Halfpenny Press* and in modern

rectitude claimed that the Syndicate was actuated by the best of motives, namely, as its name implied, the good of the people. But they were hardly to be heard for the shriek, and when they did obtain a hearing, they were quickly snubbed as immoral and un-English. Therefore, being wise, they quietly let events take their course, and so did the Syndicate.

Indeed, the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate worked away on the Holy Mountain as if nothing at all were happening below, as if their right to the hill were absolutely undisputed. People saw gardens being laid out on the slopes, and scaffolding again erected on the Temple. The dome was taken off. "Why?" said everybody. Venturesome men did occasionally manage to set foot within the enclosures, but since each returned bearing a different tale, nobody was much the wiser.

What was the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate? Who was it? What was it going to do?

Something very irreligious and wicked, no doubt!

But the secret was well kept. And when London, soon tired, as usual, of fixing its attention on one thing, began to veer in favour of the Syndicate, then the cat—a sort of beer-garden—was let out of the bag, and then, in truth, the denominationalists began to perceive Anti-Christ upon the Mountain. They helped each other develop such a rage and fear that one and all, forgetting their internecine warfare, began to call on the Archbishop of All the Empire, believing that in him they saw the strong man of the moment.

The Archbishop of all the Empire certainly was a strong man—muscularly and rhetorically. He had been chosen in order that the Church might have at its head a man whose vigour should appeal to the vigorous young colonies and who would on that account, as the *Half-penny Press* said, 'further cement the ties which bound the colonies indissolubly to the Motherland.'

In youth he had been a mighty footballer, celebrated for his charging, tackling, kicking, and (in football pavilions) for his language. He had enabled Oxford to hold its own against the world—in football. Having dislocated his knee-cap when he was fellow of Keble, in Oxford *v.* The Japanese Empire, he shaved off his moustache, and entered the Church. From him came those famous sayings :

“There may be more Christianity on the football field than in churches and at Dorcas meetings.”

“Souls can be won upon the Empire’s playing grounds.”

Far and wide was the Archbishop admired as a strong, tall, bullet-headed, black-jowled, black-eyed piece of manhood ; brawny and strong-voiced, breezy and obstinate. It was said of him that he had never known indigestion or toothache, and that every morning, between his private devotions and the Eucharist, he spent a good half-hour with his home-exerciser and dumbbells. When he was perambulating his Imperial diocese, on which, as he frequently reminded his flocks, the sun never set, he was the life itself of ships’ passengers and of caravans. He organised deck games and after-dinner entertainments to such a degree of perfection that rich invalids paid large sums to make their sea-voyages abroad with the dear Archbishop, and an article appeared in the *Lancet* on *The Archbishop of All the Empire’s Psycho-Therapeutic System in Hypochondria*. He was, in short, a singularly good specimen of the retired athlete who, instead of taking a public-house, had dropped most appropriately into a government appointment ; into, that is, the Archbishopric of All the Empire.

To this man, now, the denominations turned, crying : “Archbishop, save yourself ! Me too !”

The *Halfpenny Press* remarked sarcastically that the sects could show their Christian spirit better by moving another mountain than by seeking to check national progress ; that if they had the faith, doubtless they could do so. A rumour spread about, and was carefully nursed, that the government had promised, unofficially, to the sects any mountain or hill that they could move to the vicinity of London, as the Holy Mountain had been moved.

A second cry rose up : “ Let the Archbishop move a hill ! ”

Whereupon the Archbishop of all the Empire, athlete, eueptic and optimist, feeling strong in the strength of popularity, broke with his friend and patron, Sir Pushcott Bingley, and, for the first time in the history of the episcopacy, listened to the people’s cry.

#### IV

West of Marlborough the Kennet Valley becomes not much more than a vast open depression in the Downs. Early one spring morning there crawled up the valley a curious procession, made up very largely of clergymen on dusty bicycles, who were pedalling laboriously, with red faces, out of Marlborough, along the white valley road, and up into the Downs towards Silbury Hill and Avebury. It was as if the waters of the river had turned into men and had started flowing the other way.

Then, about half-past ten o’clock, a still more curious, a grotesque, procession came up among the hills and proceeded with most dignified pace in the same direction. The *cortège* was composed of a number of huge variously coloured motor cars and an astonishing flock of dilapidated cabs. It seemed as if one small town could hardly

have contained so many shabby cabs, rheumatic coachmen, and ancient, spavined, roaring horses. A sort of wave ran backwards and forwards, up and down the procession ; for the motor drivers were continually throttling down their engines to the pace of the cabs, and the cabdrivers as continually whipped their horses up in a vain attempt to outstrip the motors. The ruthless sunshine of the Downs and the large openness of the land lit up the procession with the utmost clearness, and at the same time dwarfed it. From one of the higher Downs close by, it looked like a scene from an insects' comic opera.

In the foremost motor car, a powerful six-cylinder road racer, lent for the occasion, the Archbishop of All the Empire, well goggled, sat solidly beside the driver. His chaplain, in the tonneau behind, hugged the varnished box containing the pastoral staff, in order to keep it from wobbling or shaking.

Some of the people belonging to the houses alongside the road—at Preshute, Clatford, West Overton and West Kennet—wondered whatever was afoot. Others, a minority, prided themselves on being in the know, and felt immensely important, and showed it. “They’re going to move Silbury Hill to London, like Ramshorn Hill. The Archbishop of All the Empire is going to do a miracle.” A Wiltshire antiquarian, a stumpy little man with a red face and a rapid tongue, bicycled hastily from group to group of onlookers. “Are they going to move Silbury Hill ? They haven’t given *me* notice of it. They *are* going to, d’you say ? It’s disgraceful. An irreparable loss to the county. Why, it’s the largest artificial hill in Europe. I shall write to the papers and put a stop to it. I shall write to the *Times* !”

“Thee’s better hurry up, guv’nor, or thee’s goin’ to be too late.”

Whereupon the antiquarian remounted his bicycle and

rode off in the direction of Calne, saying : “ I shall telegraph to the Prime Minister ! ” A cackle of laughter sped him on.

The Archbishop’s procession came to a stop outside a house under Silbury Hill. In a dim little parlour, still smelling of the damped-down washing that was usually kept there, and of the plants that had been removed from the window, those who were to take part in the ceremony put on their vestments, and once more set out, on foot this time, for the hill itself—the Archbishop in his gorgeous cope and mitre, preceded by his chaplain bearing high the pastoral staff, and by a choir of boys and men in red cassocks and funny little things of surplices. Behind them, in order of precedence, marched many other clergymen, garbed, so it struck the eye, out there on the Downs, in vestments bought up at old clothes shops and in dirty boots ; then a body of non-conformist ministers who, having no vestments to wear, looked like birds in the moulting season ; then an undisciplined line of the laity and of the people who had financed or otherwise helped towards the ceremony ; and lastly the common people of the district, and the motor drivers and coachmen that, in their own words, didn’t want to miss the show. Reporters and special Press correspondents—who with worried or jeering faces ran up and down the line, snatching interviews—completed the semi-official, semi-secret party. Semi-official, semi-secret, because the ceremony was to be considered official and public only if, and after, it succeeded. Should it not succeed, the least said soonest mended. It was an ecclesiastical *coup d'état*, based less on faith in God than on faith in the well-tried adage, *Nothing succeeds like success*.

By the time the Archbishop and his retinue arrived at the actual foot of the acclivity, the hem of his gorgeous cope was powdered with chalk dust. One by

one, most impressively, like a steeplechase, they passed up, over, and down the bare bank, set foot on the short grass, and began to climb. It was noticed that the Archbishop was rather breathless, and one of his clergy counselled him to rest a while, sitting down—a piece of advice impossible to follow because a chalky patch on the seat of his cope would seriously have prejudiced the dignity of the supreme moment.

In keeping with the semi-secret nature of the proceedings was the absence of any hymn. The chauffeurs and drivers who remained below, saw the Archbishop and his company round him kneel upon the grass. Next they saw him rise up and take the pastoral staff into his hand. Everyone else stayed kneeling around him—spots of black, white, and red on the sage-green hill. The upland wind whistled gently, with a plaintive sound as of distant sorrow in it, through the long dead grass-stalks from which last year's seed had fallen. The curious silence of the Downs fell on the scene like a sort of light that defines things even while it diminishes them. A lark rose gloriously into the sky. A rabbit or two peeped out. Small and aimless did the ceremony appear, amid the clearness, the largeness, the purity of the Downs.

The sun, sliding out from behind a cloud, shone upon the vestments of the Archbishop. But hardly had the watchers round about grasped the goodness of the omen, when a most secular-looking confabulation was seen to be taking place on the top of the hill. The Archbishop obviously made a decision ; and then the procession formed up again for marching down the hill. Some of the participants were comically hard put to keep their footing on the slippery dead grass of the slope. With one or two stumbles, however, they did arrive safely at the bottom.

For just after the Archbishop had recited solemnly :

*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place ; and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible to you ;—* just when he was preparing to make the grand effort of faith ;—his chaplain, with a sudden, startled expression, had got up from his knees and approached irreverently nearer, saying : “ If you move the hill, your grace, we shall go with it ! ”

His grace glared a moment.

“ Why didn’t you remind me before ? ” he snapped.

The chaplain added in apologetic tones : “ And if we go down again, your grace, we shall spoil the ceremony.”

“ Of course we are going down,” said the Archbishop with that rapid decision for which he was so famous. “ Of course we are going down. Go in front, please.”

The chaplain reassumed his ecclesiastical expression and led the way down the hillside.

Those who were down below—chauffeurs, drivers, common people—thought at first that the ceremony had been a failure. They peered and buzzed. The procession, however, got into order at the foot of the hill ; debated a little and moved further off ; consulted a little more and moved away still further. If Silbury Hill was going to be moved, it was most essential to know where Silbury Hill began.

Once more, at a safe distance, everybody knelt. Once more, the Archbishop began the special form of service that he and his domestic chaplain had composed. A cloud came over the sun. All the sullenness of nature, all the obduracy of the earth, was reflected from the long dun-coloured slopes. The Archbishop rose to his feet. The remainder abased themselves, stealing sly glances through praying fingers.

What, some of them wondered, what was going on in the mind of that vested Prince of the Church ? Was he

filled with prayer and faith above the measure of ordinary men's. He spread out his hands towards heaven and the hill. Did God hear him? Was the hill beginning to move?

On the contrary, it was the Archbishop who moved.

He fell forward on his face. He mimicked the fall of Alexander Trotman down that other Holy Mountain, that bogus Holy Mountain of the music-hall stage.

They ran towards him; respectfully mauled him about; turned him over on his back; and—in a phrase consecrated by death—life was found to be extinct.

A strange conservatism asserted itself; the Archbishop's body in its cope—the dead athlete in the Church's uniform—was placed not in the comfortable swift motor car which had brought him to Silbury Hill, but in a rickety old cab. His mitre, which fell off into the roadway while the cope and its dead human contents were being juggled through the narrow doorway of the cab, was flung carelessly upon the front seat. A man with a red face, old top-hat, a livery coat above and frayed check trousers below, drove the body to Marlborough. The motor cars and the other cabs followed after. Never since he was carried off the football field, arms and legs hanging limply down, had the Archbishop proceeded anywhere in so undignified and so bedraggled a manner.

After they were all gone, the sun still shone gloriously upon the pure wide spaces; the larks still sang; and Silbury Hill still stood in the place where it was heaped up by men who toiled when busy England was marsh, moor and forest; when the changeless Downs, under prehistoric sunlight, were much as they are to-day.

It was said by some that the great Archbishop's faith had killed him. Others held that the dear Archbishop had been too good to live. The coroner's verdict was syncope; an athlete's heart degenerated

by a sedentary life ; death accelerated by fatigue and excitement.

The religious organisations in their disappointment found it hard to treat in kindly fashion the memory of the deceased prelate. He had failed them ; had been rotten at the core. His degenerate heart had been unfitted for spiritual gymnastics. Yet they *had* to have another Holy Mountain, for if they did not, they would fail to regenerate the nation, and, moreover, they would lose prestige and be exposed to the ridicule of the *Half-penny Press*. Their case was desperate. What could be done ? they asked.

A celebrated geologist, an F.R.S., who was heavily fee'd for his advice, declared weightily that there was nothing in the geological formation beneath Silbury Hill which could prevent it from being moved bodily as Ramshorn Hill had been. The artificial hill itself might be at fault, but not the geological strata. A body of scientists held out hope that something might be done in time if a few philanthropists or, say, an American millionaire would found and endow a special institution for scientific research into mountain moving. A labour member declared that he could move a mountain from anywhere to anywhere, given time and money and the unemployed and socialism.

The Bishop of London was asked to make a second spiritual attempt on a day to be set apart for national prayer, and he promised most carefully to consider the matter. Denominational hopes ran high. But finally he said that under the sad circumstances, and considering the many calls on his time, he hardly thought it proper to act where his late chief had failed. Thereupon, in its head-lines, the *Penny Press* proclaimed :

DIGNIFIED ATTITUDE OF THE BISHOP OF LONDON,  
and the *Halfpenny Press* shouted :

BISHOP OF LONDON FUNKS IT.

A very popular young nonconformist preacher did secretly and very unsuccessfully make a second attempt. Silbury Hill refused to budge. The sects, made to feel more distinctly than ever that they were on their trial, became correspondingly acrimonious. People jibbed at their verbal antics. Two waves of dissatisfaction, one from Castle Street, Trowbury, and the other from Halfpenny Press Buildings, London, seemed to be spreading rapidly over the whole of the country, like ripples from two stones, a small and a large, thrown into a pond.

## V

Mr. Trotman's threat that, if the Holy Mountain did not soon produce money, Alec should go to London and earn his living came, of course, to nothing. Alec could hardly have earned enough to keep a tramp ; certainly not enough for his tonics and patent foods. Besides, he was Mayor of Trowbury, *ex-officio* member of his father's household. Worst of all, Mr. Trotman had to pay his subscriptions not only to all sorts of charities, but to those presentations which are continually being made in places like Trowbury, probably because the promoters have too little to do, and too few brains to bring themselves before the local public in any other way.

At first, Alec would have liked very well to go to London, where his Julia was. He might have found out why she was so long in replying to his letters, why she had so coldly requested him to write no more and had ended up her last letter with : "I can never be yours, Mr. Trotman, and you must learn to take *NO* for an answer."

On Julia's return to the Emporium, the slighting

remarks of his father, and this time of his mother too, soon informed him of the fact. How he hated his parents for what they said about his Julia ! How he boiled to give them what they gave ! But he had always had difficulty in saying the things he imagined ; his best retorts had always come to him perhaps days afterwards. And now, since his illness, he scarcely felt fit to get into a downright temper. He took to heart old Nurse Parfitt's saying, "I keeps meself to meself, I do." He determined to do the same. "The time will come ! Ah, the time *will* come !" It felt fine to repeat that to himself. He lounged about the mayoral residence, behind and above the Famous Grocery, for ever irritating his father by an apathy which hid from his parents a gathering together of his forces, a growing devotion to one idea—his Julia.

Alec was one of those in whom feeling almost entirely takes the place of ordered thought ; whose mental processes neither express themselves in conversation, nor can be precisely expressed in words. An harmonium might have expressed his solemn heavier moods, a whistle-pipe his merriment.

Shortly after the failures to move Silbury Hill, he received a letter, marked *Strictly Private and Confidential*, from the Permanent Grand Committee (Re-constituted). Would he consent to receive a deputation with a view to his removing another hill from Wiltshire to the neighbourhood of London ?

"What's that ?" asked Mr. Trotman, breaking off short a complaint about the staleness of the bread and the servant's lack of enthusiasm in eating up the household's stale crusts. When any member of his family received a letter the contents of which he could not succeed in reading—by the simple process of opening it on delivery,—he always asked in a commanding tone : "What's that ?"

"I don't know," replied Alec, blushing and pocketing the letter.

"Let me see."

"Let your father see it, Allie dear," said Mrs. Trotman.

Alec handed over the letter. "I don't know what they mean."

"H'm!" his father grunted. "It's easy enough to see what they mean—a very business-like communication,—but I don't quite see what they're trying to get at."

"Why," said Mrs. Trotman, who now had an opportunity of glancing herself, "they want Alec to move another mountain 'to be devoted exclusively to religious purposes,' Allie dear. . . ."

"What do they want another for? They've made mess enough of one."

"That wasn't Alec's fault, James."

"Well, it's perfectly clear to anybody but a fool that there's no money in the job."

"You don't know that yet. When Sir Pushcott does pay . . ."

"He'll never pay. He's fairly diddled the lot of us."

"I suppose you think that if Alec hadn't moved the Holy Mountain, you'd have gone on being mayor for years, and then they'd have knighted you when there was a royal visit?"

Mr. Trotman knew better than to attack his wife in fair verbal fight. "No such thing! There's no money in this mountain moving. I always said so."

"James!"

"Well, d'you think you could move another hill, Alec?"

Alexander stared a moment. "No, I don't think I could. I don't know how I moved Ramshorn Hill—if I did do it."

"Of course you did it . . ." Mrs. Trotman was beginning.

"That settles it," snapped the ex-Mayor. "Write and tell 'em you won't—not you can't. Mention your health, d'you see? Let me look at the letter before it goes.—My boots, please. Got to see someone on business. Sharp's the word!"

He lighted one of his cheap morning cigars and went out of the room, declaring with the air of a prophet: "There's no money in this sort of thing. Not a penny piece!"

Alec seated himself in his father's arm-chair and lighted a cigarette; for he had begun to smoke, in spite of his mother's fear for his health and his father's philosophic declaration: "A totally unnecessary expense. If you never smoke, you'll never want to."

## VI

Whatever Mr. Trotman might have said at home, he could not forbear boasting at the Blue Boar that his son, the son of Alderman James Trotman, had been asked to move another mountain. And he further said that his son had no intention of considering the offer, not yet at any rate. Even a price (this was mentioned in confidence) had been suggested for the proposed miracle, but no more hills would his son move unless everything, everything, was down in black and white.

Mr. Ganthorn, between two sips of stout, called it a case of *reductio ad absurdum*, a sarcasm that the ex-Mayor felt rather than understood.

News of the letter from the Permanent Committee (Reconstituted) worked round to Julia. It seemed in-

credible. But she was still more surprised on receiving a note the next early-closing day :—

“ Come out to Nurse’s to tea. Don’t fail.  
Important—Alec.

“ Your loving  
“ EDIE.”

Julia donned her new dress—she had been able to get herself one, and Mrs. Clinch had given her another, since her return to Trowbury,—and set out on foot for Mrs. Parfitt’s.

Just where the Downs proper begin, where the hedges give way to flowery banks, she saw Miss Starkey coming to meet her, also in a new and, to tell the truth, rather a startling costume.

“ Julie ! Dear ! ”

Miss Starkey’s embrace had a certain adroitness, a whiff of professionalism, about it. Julia had never quite liked her friend’s kisses. At times . . . But she was not one to suspect her friends. Miss Starkey, she thought, had had her life’s lesson. Now, of course, she was extra help in a West End bar. Julia thought she was lucky to get there, for she knew how pitilessly women are punished for a five minutes’ plunge into nature.

“ What is it ? ” she asked. “ I’m so pleased to see you, dear, but you know you ought not to have come. Those—those liars will turn you out again if they catch you.”

“ Oh, no, they won’t. I’ve got money enough for cab-hire. Tradesmen and policemen always respect a cab. I came out to Nurse’s in a cab—a beastly old growler with a perfect fool of a driver. What cabs they do have in places like this ! . . .”

Miss Starkey was plainly beating about the bush.  
“How deadly dull it is down here,” she began again.

“What did you come down for, dear?” Julia asked.  
“I’m not so sure. I’ll tell you now.”

“Edie!”

“Well, look here. . . .”

They were walking along under a glorious south-western sky. Huge clouds, in motion like great laden ships, sailed majestically over the tops of the Downs. The tumultuous confusion of spring was stirring all around. They did not specially notice the day; it was not, indeed, till their conversation became absorbing that their attention was directed upon much else than keeping their new skirt-tails out of the mud. But they breathed the deeper; walked the faster; and who can say that it was not the stir of the season and the spaciousness of sky and Downs, which gave more breadth to their thoughts, more openness to their speech, more candour to their conversation? Certainly it was so with Julia.

“Look here,” said Miss Starkey, “I’ve got to know a man . . .”

(Had she been the old Edith Starkey, or even a bar-maid, she would have called him a gentleman.)

“—I’ve got to know a man—talking over the bar, you know—he’s a sort of newspaper man, journalist—a man who writes for the *Halfpenny Press*—he calls himself a slap-up journalist when he’s a bit on—you can’t take a rise out o’ me sort of thing,—and, talking over the counter, he told me—well, something about the Holy Mountain, something your Alec would cut off his ears to hear, or his beastly old man would, anyhow. And as I had five pounds to spare—a silly old fellow, nasty fat old chap with a red nose and a hob-nail liver, I should think, asked me to marry him, and when I wouldn’t he gave me a fiver—that’s life in a bar

all over ;—well, I thought I'd come down and tell you, because it's important ; only you won't tell anybody I told you, will you ? ”

“ Well, what is this fine news ? ” asked Julia with the feigned good humour of anxiety.

“ It's like this. . . . This young man—he's not half a bad boy—bit conceited—he was rather up the pole and said he wanted sympathy and was sick of keeping his ambitions to himself—he's Sir Pushcott Bingley's secretary for all the Holy Mountain work, so *he* knows ; he said Sir Pushcott Bingley has sublet the Holy Mountain to himself.”

“ What do you mean ? You're teasing me, Edie.”

“ No, I'm not. I mean what I say. Sir Pushcott Bingley has sublet the Holy Mountain to himself and one or two other rich men. They've made a syndicate, a private syndicate, *not* a registered company like they ought to.”

“ Whatever's that ? I don't understand business like you. I thought 'twas let to a Pro Bono Publico company.”

“ That's it ! Sir Pushcott and his friends, they are the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate. I'll tell you from the beginning and then you'll understand. I made Johnny Fulton explain it all carefully ; kept on at him ; said I was going to start a millinery company myself. Pretty trouble 'twas ! Sir Pushcott Bingley, acting for Alec Trotman, let the Holy Mountain to the Permanent Committee—the religious people. Didn't he ? He let it, in the first place, by the month, for six months, the rent to be paid in advance. Well, even now they've only paid up the first two months' rent. They thought that when they'd had their Grand United Opening Ceremony of the Imperial Temple, they'd be able to collect money to carry on the good work, and then they'd be able to pay up their back rent. As they were so behindhand

with the rent, Sir Pushcott could practically send them going at a moment's notice. . . . D'you understand that? ”

“ Yes, I think so.”

“ That's all right, then. Well, he gave them enough rope and, like he thought they would, they hanged themselves. The Grand United Opening Ceremony was a frost. Sir Pushcott didn't see where the money was coming from, and besides he had another little plan in his noddle. So he turned them out, bag and baggage, and they couldn't go to law, because for one thing they'd have lost the case, and for another thing, Sir Pushcott knew they daren't make public how much of the money they had paid to themselves and to secretaries and those sort of people. Him, and someone else I mustn't say, and a rich City man, a Jew, formed what they called the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate to take over the Holy Mountain. Then Sir Pushcott, acting for Alec, leased the Mountain to the Syndicate—that is, to himself and the someone else and the Jew....”

“ What are they going to do with it? ”

“ Wait a minute; that's what I'm coming to. It's a dead secret *who* it is and *what* it is. The Syndicate has got separate offices in Cheapside with Johnny Fulton supposed to be manager, and no one knows anything, though one or two people are getting rather nosey. They're going to spring it all at once. The place is to be opened as a huge amusement affair with a music-hall in the Imperial Temple and a beer-garden on the roof where you can look over the whole of London. Of course, they'll do just what they like, because, you see, Sir Pushcott has the *Halfpenny Press* behind him, and he could say things about almost every big man in London. I think the Holy Mountain is going to be a ripping place, and they'll haul in money simply hand over foot, Johnny Fulton says.”

"But they've made Alec break his promise to let the Church have it. He promised . . ."

"Pooh ! what does that matter ? Besides, he's had precious little to do with it. The Holy Mountain is going to be the jolliest place round London. Johnny Fulton has promised me a free pass. He says that as a music-hall and beer-garden the Imperial Temple will be worth . . ."

"I think it's all of it very disgusting."

They were near Mrs. Parfitt's little cottage. Julia's disgust was quite sincere. Beautiful scenes ; continued attention, such as listening to a long conversation or reading a book through at a sitting ; or, indeed, any long emotional stress, have almost always the effect of setting a man or woman into a different relation to the everyday world. From the new elevation, he or she looks down on mankind struggling, himself or herself included ; looks in the face of fate itself ; and becomes, till the mood wears off, recklessly frank.

There was now, in Julia's speech, such a farnought sincerity that she half frightened Edith Starkey, and when she had finished, she was more than a little frightened at herself. Nurse Parfitt's welcome, it was, which brought her back to earth, her same self, as it seemed, yet not the same in outlook and intention ; not the same in regard to Alec ; for she felt that Alec had been cheated.

"There now, my dears !" exclaimed the old woman. "How glad I be to see 'ee again ! I've a-been summut lonely be meself an' so many things has happened. Now do 'ee take hold the little 'en a minute while I d' go out an' make that there kettle boil. You be quite a grand Lun'on lady now, Miss Starkey, my dear."

Julia took the baby while Miss Starkey removed her hat before Mrs. Parfitt's broken scrap of looking-glass. The baby nestled down in her arms, looked up, and

crowed to her ; and something of the exalted frankness that remained prompted her to say :

“ Edie dear, I think he *is* rather like Alec.”

“ Alec ! Why should he be like Alec ? Alec Trotman didn’t have anything to do with him.”

“ But you told me . . .”

“ A soft boy like that ! With not a penny to bless himself with ! His old man takes care of that.”

“ But you said quite plainly . . . Don’t you remember that evening at your lodgings in Trowbury ? ”

“ No, I don’t. I don’t remember anything I said then. A lot of nonsense. You were kind, old Julie, I know ; and that’s all. If you’d like to know really, I’ll tell you. ’Twas that—that beastly old Blue Bore, Ganthorn, and he’s been sending me money since, when he’s got to, to keep me quiet.”

Julia got up and put the baby down in a chair. “ Edie, I must go now. Really. I can’t wait for tea. Don’t stop me. I’ll see you to-morrow, when I’ve had time. . . . No, don’t say anything. Good night.”

Something in Julia’s voice, as though she were forcing it up her throat through a wad of cotton wool, did prevent Miss Starkey from saying anything.

The last thing Julia heard was the cry of the baby she had so abruptly put down in a chair instead of safely on the floor. She even resented in part its not being Alec’s. On the way into Trowbury, she decided to beard the Famous Grocer in his Famous Grocery. She would see the Trotmans. She must see Alec and explain. She didn’t care how Mrs. Trotman sniffed and Mr. Trotman bullied. She had done Alec wrong, and wrong had been done to him. She would put things right. She would tell him. She would tell him that evening. She would . . .

It must be confessed that her motives, though all good, were nevertheless a little mixed.

## VII

Mrs. Trotman was in the kitchen making marmalade ; that is to say, she was superintending the servant, who had not yet that day been given time to change her dress. For with a patent orange-slicer Mrs. Trotman had very nearly cut off the top of her finger, and now, with the finger in a rag dolly, she was instructing the servant in the right and wrong way of working the machine. "We shan't get done to-day," she was saying, "if you don't hurry up. Put your hands to it properly. You're afraid of your fingers."

"I am hurrying up, 'm, all I can."

"There ! do be careful, or you'll cut your finger too."

A ring at the front-door bell. . . .

"Who's that ?" exclaimed Mrs. Trotman. "I'll go. No, you'd better go, Jane. I've got this finger. It may be the Vicar about the parish tea."

Jane held out her juicy hands helplessly.

"Go on !" urged Mrs. Trotman. "Wash your hands, stupid ! You'll make every door-handle in the house sticky."

Julia was on the point of ringing the bell a second time when flushed and dirty Jane opened the door. Was Mr. or Mrs. Trotman in ? she asked. Jane thought so, and the mere young lady from the Emporium was, in accordance with the household etiquette, left standing on the door-mat, where she could smell plainly the sickly, sticky odour of squashed oranges and boiling sugar—a smell that she always expected afterwards on entering the Famous Grocery.

"Please 'm," said Jane, quite audibly in the kitchen, "it's that Miss Jepp from Clinch's."

"What *does* she want? Ask her into the sitting-room, not the drawing-room—d'you hear?—and shut the door."

As soon as the door was shut, Julia being safe within, Mrs. Trotman made a rush for her bedroom, to titivate, as she would have said. She tore off the dolly, revived the bleeding, poured some cold water into her wash-hand basin and swished her finger round and round in it. The blood spread through the water in bright red whorls. Mrs. Trotman felt faint. (It was part of her life's ceremonial, a lady-like elegance, to feel faint at the sight of blood.) She sniffed, therefore, at a bottle of salts till her eyes ran and she had to catch hold of the bed-rail.

She became thoroughly flustered, her brain all of a caddle. It was not the best preparation for meeting Julia with proper dignity.

But meanwhile, in the sitting-room :

Alec had been lounging as usual in his father's arm-chair. He did not trouble to move, or even turn his head, until he heard to a certainty that the footstep in the room was an unusual one. Then he looked round, jumped up.

"Julie!"

"Alec!"

With the sensitive ear of a boy baulked in love, he detected the change in Julia's voice. He heard again the former motherly tone. He took Julia into his arms—and was surprised to find her there.

Had anyone looked at the little scene without imagination, they might have found it rather repulsive, or else rather funny, according to whether prudishness or humour was topmost in their mind. The very callow youth—the motherly Emporium young lady, already approaching a premature middle age—the love-tones in their voices—a lovers' embrace—the

love-experience of generations suddenly and grotesquely come to a head in this hitherto listless youth and this rather too much dressed woman. . . . Aye ! it was funny, that kiss of theirs, and it was repulsive, there in that ugly sitting-room ; it was both funny and repulsive by contrast ; that is to say, the sitting-room was funny and repulsive, but their coming together was one of the things they will remember in heaven if so be they ever get there.

“ Whatever’s brought you ? ” Alec asked.

“ I’ve heard something important about your Holy Mountain.”

“ Why didn’t you write to me ? What made you so queer ? ”

“ Alec dear, it wasn’t my fault. I’d rather not tell you. You don’t mind, do you ? ”

In fact, Julia no longer wanted to explain. They looked into one another’s eyes. A force, like gravity in its almost inhuman persistence, was drawing them together again. . . .

“ Here’s the old woman ! ” said Alec.

They sprang apart.

Mrs. Trotman, hurrying into the room, either saw or divined that something untoward was in the air. She drew herself up, still holding the handle of the door, and with that dignity which had so distinguished her as Mayoress, she inquired : “ To what do I owe the pleasure ? ”

“ All right,” said Alec, not without dignity on his part too. “ Julia has come to tell us something about the Holy Mountain—something important.”

“ Julia ? ”

“ Well then, Miss Jepp.”

“ And what has Miss Jepp to tell us about the Holy Mountain ? ”

“ You’re being deceived, madam. Cheated ! ”

"Oh, nonsense ! Alec's friend, Sir Pushcott Bingley, will see to that."

"It's him who's doing it!"

Mrs. Trotman was quiet for a short while. She drew up a blind, rearranged an antimacassar. When she did speak, it was with something less of the mayoral dignity. "Mr. Trotman must hear of this. But please tell me. . . . I don't mind letting you know that we *have* heard something. Won't you sit down ? "

"They're making it into a sort of big public-house—a music-hall and beer-garden in the Temple !" said Julia, plunging straight into her tale.

"But please begin at the beginning.—Alec dear, go and ask the Vicar how many pounds of tea he thinks we shall want at the parish tea to-morrow.—Mr. Trotman provides the tea, you know, Miss Jepp."

"Not me ! I'm going to hear. It's my Mountain, and you can't say it isn't."

Mrs. Trotman turned to Julia with a jangle of her bracelets and the sweetest of her smiles. "So kind of you to come ! "

Miss Starkey's account, which was somewhat confused, had been plainness itself compared with Julia's. She, woman-like, remembered everything but the hard facts. During the interview, however, Mrs. Trotman saw more and more that there was good reason to be amiable, and in the end she confessed : "Sir Pushcott has told us nothing. He *must* be making money out of it ; the rents of public-houses are enormous, I know ; but we haven't seen a penny here except the few pounds he sent us at first. When Mr. Trotman writes we only get a letter saying nothing from the secretary. I *always* thought it would come to this. Sir Pushcott has no religious principle<sup>r</sup>; none whatever. You must stay to supper, Miss Jepp, and tell Mr. Trotman about

it. I don't think I understand everything exactly, but he'll soon see into it."

"The Temple a beer-garden!" echoed Miss Jepp.

"And Sir Pushcott's sent us nothing, neither money nor news!" re-echoed Mrs. Trotman.

"Strikes me his promises are like pie-crust. Never could eat that," added Alec with shocking levity.

"And who did you say told you?" Mrs. Trotman asked.

"Miss Starkey."

"The one who used to be here, in the shop?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Trotman went to have a look at the larder, confident that the presence of the servant, whom she told to lay supper, would prevent anything improper between Alec and Miss Jepp. She called in the shop for a tin of ox-tongue, and, generally, arranged for such a spread as Castle Street custom and house-pride would have obliged her to lay before her worst enemy.

Mr. Trotman, home early because sent for from the Blue Boar, was most gallantly polite to Julia. He hoped she would not object to the simplicity of the tinned fare, and cracked jokes at his wife's expense. "Plain but good, is our motto, Miss Jepp, in food—and people!"

Then the tale is told. Mr. Trotman, seated on one side of the fireplace with his whiskey and after-supper cigar, listens judicially, explaining from time to time the hidden business motives of the events that Julia relates. Julia herself, in the basket chair on the other side, leans forward with her hands in her lap, twiddling her fingers, her face alight with talking. She looks like a girl again when she raises her head. Mrs. Trotman sits in a low chair between them, and Alec sprawls half-way across the far side of the table. The gaslight

brings out the bony substructure of their faces. The air is full of important matters and of trivial smells—whiskey, tobacco, scent, cigarettes. London and the great are on their trial within the sanctity of an English home. The mammon of success and unrighteousness is brought to judgment before England's middle-class ideal.

Julia, unfortunately, being ignorant of the ways of mammon major, was quite unable to make his operations clear. She emphasised the sacrilegiousness of the affair to ears that were all agog for the monetary side of it. She was more inaccurate than she or the Trotmans knew. Her striving after truth ended in lies and confusion. Mr. Trotman's business acumen was baffled.

"It's very evident that something's up," said he wisely.

"It ought to be stopped," said Julia, thinking only of the Temple beer-garden.

"Sir Pushecott's certainly doing something he hasn't told us about."

"You ought to stop it."

"D'you know, Miss Jepp, I think we ought to see Miss Starkey before taking action in the matter."

"James!" This from Mrs. Trotman.

"We *must* be certain of our ground, my dear, and therefore we *must* see Miss Starkey."

"If she comes into the house, I go out."

"Don't be silly. Business is business. This is a business matter, nothing to do with you.—Will you, can you, bring Miss Starkey here to-morrow morning, Miss Jepp?"

"I'll try," said Julia. "If she'll come. . . ."

She glanced anxiously at the clock and got up to go. It was fully time for locking the young ladies' door at the Emporium.

Mrs. Trotman showed her out. She pressed her hand even affectionately. "You won't mind—will you?—if I ask you to bring Miss Starkey in through Cherrybud Lane and the garden—not the front door—you understand—you know. . . . We shouldn't like anybody to see. . . ."

Alec brushed past his mother. "I'll take Julia home, mother."

Very slowly they walked down to the Emporium.

"It must be stopped," repeated Julia.

"All right, Julia," said Alec airily.

Another kiss, and another "We'll manage 'em!" from Alec. The Emporium door banged. He trotted home, tiptoed past the sitting-room, and slipped into bed.

What did *he* care about the Holy Mountain?

## VIII

When an emporium has had to beg one of its young ladies to return, it becomes much more lenient to requests for hours off. Mr. Clinch grudgingly allowed Julia to go out for the morning. Mrs. Clinch added that they might be able to do without her till tea-time.

Julia's life seemed to flow backwards and forwards along the London road, between the Emporium and Mrs. Parfitt's, between Trowbury and the Downs. She thought, while she was walking out, of all the times she had tramped that way. Various objects by the roadside revived various bygone feelings. It was a mixed reverie that would look absurd if written in cold black ink. She had not been on that road in

such a happy frame of mind since the evening when Ramshorn Hill had moved. "No, but we bicycled then," she said to herself. She remembered the evening, every bit of it. Now she was going confidently to fetch Edith Starkey for the confounding of everybody who was trying to cheat Alec, her Alec, over the Holy Mountain. Mr. Trotman, he was a nasty old man and she didn't like him, but *he'd* see to it, *he'd* put it to rights.

Before she arrived even within sight of Mrs. Parfitt's cottage, she saw a milk-cart outside the Three Wains public-house, and in the milk-cart she saw a band-box which she was quite sure belonged to Edith Starkey. And as she was taking a peep at the label, she heard Edith Starkey's voice inside the Three Wains ; a merry laugh and a loud guffaw. She walked shyly into the open door, looked through a little jug-and-bottle window. Miss Starkey was there. She was joking and laughing with a strong brown-faced young carter, who was plainly proud of the young lady's distinguished attentions. His weathered countenance, the moustache and brows of which were lighter than his skin, and his bright eyes, followed her about the room. Miss Starkey preened and cooed under the half shy, half bold regard of such a splendid young human animal. He thought her a fine hearty lady ; he was sadly idealising her. And she was idealising him. She had seldom met his like. It was a radiantly healthy clean-limbed young fellow, who in his way treated her with much politeness. In their little idyll, their morning bacchanal, extremes met for a few minutes on their only common ground, and for a few minutes, both desired what neither had and neither would willingly have kept for long.

Julia tapped diffidently, and tapped again.  
"Just a mo', Jimmy," said Miss Starkey.

"Oh-aouw!"

"Hullo, Julie! What d'you want?"

"Mr. Trotman wants me to take you in there to tell him about the Holy Mountain."

"Does he? Wants to make use of me again, does he? Come off his righteous perch, eh? You can tell him I may call somewhen in the day."

"They asked me to take you there myself. They're very upset, and I couldn't explain properly, like you can. And Edie . . . Mrs. Trotman wants me to take you in through Cherrybud Eane and the garden way. That's why."

Tactless Julia! somewhat too straightforward to be a go-between. Miss Starkey faced round both literally and metaphorically. "You can tell the Trotmans to go to the devil—all of 'em—d'you hear!"

Julia stood hesitating.

"I'm going back to London straight away. This young man is taking me to the station, ain't you, Jimmy?"

"Oh-aouw!"

"If you wanted to see me, what did you go away last night for? I came down on purpose to see you."

Miss Starkey returned to her carter, laughing merrily again, whilst Julia retreated from the Three Wains, glancing anxiously up and down the road to see if anybody who mattered had caught sight of her. She walked with a step suddenly grown tired back to the Emporium, and set to work on a yard or two of material which was afterwards to figure in the window as *Modish Blouse. The Latest, 7s. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.*

The land of her castles in the air had always been subject to earthquakes.

## IX

The result of Miss Starkey's flying visit to Trowbury was at least threefold. In the first place, Julia, feeling unusually lonely, allowed Alec formally to muddle through the formal question, formally accepted him, and formally wore a pretty engagement ring. In the second place, Mr. Trotman wrote to Sir Pushcott Bingley, demanding in full an account of the Holy Mountain and threatening to instruct his solicitor. And, lastly, Alec wrote secretly and posted with unnecessary precautions a letter to the baronet in which he asked boldly for enough money to get married on.

Sir Pushcott was wanting a change: the spring had got into his blood too. He decided on a brief motor tour into the West-country. Mr. Trotman's threat to instruct his solicitor might mean a certain amount of trouble — someone else to be squared. Sir Pushcott, therefore, thought it would be well to break his tour at Trowbury and to see how things really stood.

So, one evening again, his large motor car buzzed over the Downs like an incalculably swift insect and drew up outside the Famous Grocery Establishment. Mr. Trotman was at home. Sir Pushcott flattered himself that he knew his man quite well enough for all practical purposes, and on being shown into the frowsy fripperied dining-room, he led off his hand at once.

"Good evening, Mr. Trotman. I have received your letter and have dealt with it myself. You understand, of course, that the Committee failed, after paying only two instalments of its rent. Now, if you like to provide the capital — a hundred thousand

or so—and meet the pending lawsuits and arbitrations, and take the whole matter out of my hands, it will be a great weight off my shoulders. If you are not prepared to lay down that sum, you will be well advised to leave the matter entirely to me. As I told you before, I have some influence in addition to the capital. In a short time, thanks to the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate, there will be money coming in over and above the expenses, and then your son will receive his income regularly, and so forth. If you do wish to take it out of my hands, perhaps you—your son, that is to say—will have the kindness to let me know at once in writing.”

Mendment Trotman assumed an air of apologetic defiance. “But . . .” he began.

“I am afraid I haven’t time to discuss the matter now. Those are my terms. My car is outside—due at Bath for dinner to-night. Good evening.”

Sir Pushcott went out, by mistake, through the shop.

A little way down the street, when the car had slowed down behind a straw waggon, Sir Pushcott’s hand was grasped, and he heard Alec saying in a voice much cheerier than he had ever heard from him before : “Did you get my letter, Sir Pushcott ? You haven’t answered it.”

“Hullo, Alec ! Is that you ? How are you now ? Yes, I got your letter. Let me see, what was it you wanted money for ? ”

“To get married on. . . .” Alec’s face was glowing.

“Why, what a set of harpies you country people are ! What do you want to get married for, eh ? ”

Alec blushed. “Please . . .” he said in confusion, then stopped short, like a small shy child out to tea and in want of a second helping.

Sir Pushcott, like many men who pride themselves on hardness, cuteness, and so on, was touched by the sweetheartsing of the younger folk. Spite of immense success in life, his own marriage had not quite come up to his expectations, nor yet had it been bad enough utterly to destroy his sense of romance. Alec's funny speech, his embarrassment and the happy new hopefulness in his face, touched the heart of the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*, lifted the hatches of a little stream deep down within him ; which caused him to act neither as the man he aimed at being, nor as the man he had become, but rather as the man he might have been.

"What does your father say to it ?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, he . . . He doesn't know. He'll . . . I don't know what."

"Come back to him with me," said Sir Pushcott.  
"Jump in. I'll fix you up."

Alec led Sir Pushcott straight to the sitting-room, and once more Mr. Trotman received a frontal attack.

"Your son, Mr. Trotman, tells me he is about to be married, and . . ."

"Nothing of the sort !"

"—and I shall be pleased to send him a little cheque —five hundred pounds or so—on account of the Holy Mountain, in advance, you understand.—Let me know the day, Alec. Where are you going to spend the honeymoon ? Eh ? Don't know ? London ? If so, I'm not sure I can't lend you a little house of mine just in the centre of all the theatres and sights. Good night, my boy. Good luck !"

Off sped the motor car to Bath. Alec, the bird in his hand at last, slipped out to the Emporium. Mr. Trotman called loudly about the house for his wife.

A couple of days afterwards, Trowbury had the

pleasure of reading in the *Halfpenny Press* a column headed :

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN  
ALEC TROTMAN'S ROMANCE  
THE COMING WEDDING  
AT TROWBURY

And that, of course, sealed the betrothal.

X

Alec did not fail to wonder, during the next few weeks, if anybody could be quite as happy as himself ; so pleasant it was to be engaged under the protection of Sir Pushcott Bingley. And besides, his Julia was received at Castle Street. Mr. Trotman sat up in his arm-chair, smoking his cheap cigars, and discoursed most civilly on the management of great businesses—grocery shops, town councils, Holy Mountains, the *Halfpenny Press*. He even began to take a pride in Julia Jepp, and declared her to be a very sensible young woman ; for was it not settled that she was to marry his son, enter into his family, and become in a sense his property ? Nothing that was the property of James Trotman could be allowed to be bad ; else it was not really his property, but a burden unfairly forced upon him. Alec had been all his life a property and an insufferable burden.

When they could escape from the paternal sunshine, Alec walked Julia out. Accept Mrs. Clinch's invitation to tea at the Emporium was the one thing he could not bring himself to do. The other young ladies would have stared and giggled so. But they

took tea more than once at old Nurse Parfitt's, amid floods of the old woman's talk. People stopped them in the street to congratulate them, and with kindly voices asked impertinent questions. Presents arrived at Castle Street ; presents from all over the country ; which, as Mr. Trotman remarked, when they were set out on a table in the drawing-room, did him proud. Alec and Julia strolled about the outskirts of the town, entering prim front gardens and peeping into the windows of empty houses, not because they wanted to rent a house—nothing of that sort was to be decided till after the honeymoon,—but because houses and firesides, dear private places, had become of special interest to them. Alec's health improved rapidly. He stood more and more on his own feet. He was becoming a man.

But whilst those two were building castles in the air—castles on a hill that had once moved and might do so again—the controversy over that same Holy Mountain grew daily more uproarious. That it should be used for pleasure, low common people's pleasure, roused the influential supporters of the Permanent Committee to hysterical indignation. At first this found vent in those newspapers, mostly religious, certainly few and unimportant, which were beyond the control of the Director of the *Halfpenny Press*. Then the *Penny Press*, out-voting Sir Pushcott's interest in its management in a vain hope of increasing its circulation, joined in the howl. Platitudes, nicely reconcocted for its readers, flew about like starlings over stubble. Indignation meetings were organised. Government interference was demanded. The King and Lords were petitioned. A reaction was forecasted. Those who had never supported the religious work of the Permanent Committee, now found themselves more than able, more than willing, to fight (vocally) under

the banner of religion ; to write, to speak, to denounce and to consign their fellow-men to hell, presumably as luggage in advance. The semi-intelligent, only capable of taking sides, divided themselves up into Trotmanites and Anti-Trotmanites, "Antichrist is come ! " said one side, while the others repeated like parrots, "Business is business ! Progress must not be stayed ! "

Alec was scarcely disturbed at all.

Finally, a syndicate of wealthy men, real and bogus philanthropists, issued an opposition halfpenny newspaper which, for the good of the cause, declined to make a profit. Sir Pushcott was compelled to look about him. By some clever manipulations on the Stock Exchange, and in virtue of some knighthoods procured by his influence with the government, he brought the philanthropists to see the expediency, the true morality, of compromise. *Daily Tidings* came, after much earnest thought and so forth, to the conclusion that the Pro Bono Publico Syndicate, under strict inspection, should be given a trial. A committee of very titled and excessively influential men and women was formed to investigate and to advise. The Pro Bono Publico Syndicate solemnly promised to be educational. The *Halfpenny Press* interviewed several doctors on the subject, *Sane Amusement a Safeguard of National Health*. Insanity, they all agreed, was frequently the result of a dull life ; and possibly cancer too ; for, as they pointed out, old maids and pensioners are peculiarly liable to cancer. The compromise was much applauded. It was found to be in accordance with the inborn sense of justice of the British race.

Julia developed a fixed dislike to the Holy Mountain and everything concerning it. Whenever—and it was often enough—Mr. Trotman laid down the law about it, she became grimly silent and bit her lips into chaps. When Alec tried to impress upon her

that their marriage and all their fortunes depended entirely on the Holy Mountain, she appeared quite unable to understand even his simple arguments. By letting him see how unhappy it made her, she effectively, if not openly, forbade him to talk about it. Once or twice they had words.

The Pro Bono Publico Syndicate arranged to open the Holy Mountain on Whit Monday. On that bank holiday also, Alexander Trotman, Mayor of Trowbury, and Julia Mary Jepp were duly married at the parish church, amid a confusion of cabs, cakes, clergy, speeches, relatives, reporters, congratulations, sightseers and luggage. There is little need to describe the ceremony. Julia did not weep. It was like any other marriage in a country town, only more so.

Neither is there any need to describe the happiness of the bridal pair. It was at once too much described and too great for description, and it was tainted with an elusive apprehension of no one knew what. Alec felt . . . But Alec was ever incapable of realising his feelings.

In the words of the *Trowbury Guardian* : "The Happy Couple left by the afternoon express for the mansion in London kindly lent them by Sir Pushcott Bingley."

## XI

With Alec and Julia, as with so many young married couples from the country, the wonder of London, seen under such special conditions, did but add itself to the wonder of being married and confirm the ceremonial breakage of a new life from the old. Though Julia, at all events, knew only too much of the modern yokel's

Mecca, everything seemed continuously new to both of them. They basked in the winks of guards and porters, nor did Julia feel herself insulted this time, for was not their position above-board now, and entirely respectable?

Mrs. Maclean, the housekeeper of Sir Pushcott Bingley's bachelor-house, as he had called it in writing to Alec, received them with kindly curiosity. Sir Pushcott, she said with an elderly servant's pleasure in the smallest doings of 'the family,' would not obtrude that day. Meanwhile, they were to be sure the house was theirs, though it was not nearly so fine as the house in Park Lane or as Lady Bingley's flat in Kensington. Dinner was timed for eight o'clock. Would that suit them?

It was all delightful. They dined together on many courses. Strangely delightful! They felt, for the time being, master and mistress of the world. They experienced to the full that silent widespread conspiracy which is always operating to marry and give in marriage.

Not that they minded. How nice, how much younger, Julia looked! And how much handsomer Alec had become! They were each other's.

One cloud there was. No need to inquire too closely into it. Call it coyness on Julia's part. She desired to go somewhere, to see something, that evening. Alec desired to stay at home till bedtime. Julia took feminine steps to get her own way; so that when Mrs. Maclean appeared at the end of dinner to gaze on the newly married couple and to excuse her fluttering round by asking if they knew London, Julia said that she did know London, that her husband did not know it at all well, and that they proposed going somewhere that very evening.

On hearing from the housekeeper that Sir Pushcott

had ordered them to have the use of a motor brougham, Alec gave way.

Where should they go ?

Mrs. Maclean was ready with a suggestion. The Holy Mountain was, of course, what they ought to go and see—its opening day too. She would ring up the garage and have the motor brougham round.

Julia's face fell. "I didn't want to think about that to-day," she whispered while the housekeeper was at the telephone.

Alec, however, newly-made possessor of Julia, was beginning to think himself a personage. Thoughts struck him very forcibly : "I am the owner of the Holy Mountain. It has been opened to-day. I moved it. It's mine. We ought to go and see it." He knew also that he would be of consequence there, and after receiving so much attention, he lusted for more. He acted decisively, not waiting to argue or discuss. "Which way do we go there ?" he asked.

Mrs. Maclean decided that they ought to go up Oxford Street and past the Park—quite near Sir Pushcott's other house,—and along the Uxbridge Road. Her philosophy of honeymooning was : "Keep them on the move, or else they'll be sure to have tiffs." She had detected that this couple was not in complete agreement over some matter or other, and therefore she hastened the more to bustle them off.

Julia, anxious to go out for her own reasons, was not unattracted by the notion of driving in a private motor through some of the great streets where aforetime she had walked or had driven on a bus. She made her husband's eagerness hers. She put herself into his hands with an almost pathetic renunciation of her customary motherliness. But she had her apprehensions all the same, and on being tucked into the comfortable brougham, a kind of weariness came

over her. She lost sight, as it were, of the future. It became foggy, dark, uncertain, and consequently to be feared.

She could have said, "I told you so!" when, at the Marble Arch, something went wrong with the machinery, and they had to back, not without risk, into a side street.

They were tired, both of them, and after taking a more or less fictitious interest in the repairs and the traffic, they sat back on the cushions and nearly fell asleep on one another's shoulders—till Julia saw a man look in at the window and grin—grin unpleasantly. Thereafter she sat bolt upright.

It was late by the time they had worked themselves through the traffic into the neighbourhood of Acton. Still tireder they were now; so tired that the lights, the people and the noise seemed part of a dream.

Suddenly Alec nudged Julia :

"I say! What's that?"

Through the hazy air they saw before them, over the housetops, what looked like a huge mound of dull flame. And, as soon as their attention was fixed upon it, they heard snatches of giddy music with an undertone of voices—the peculiar deep uncanny roar of many people shouting, talking and laughing in the distance.

"That must be the Holy Mountain," Julia replied.

"No! Really?"

"Yes. That's it."

"I say, it's fine. Isn't it?"

Julia stared at it dully. Then she said in a resigned voice : "Yes. I suppose it is. It *is* fine. Lovely!—Alec, I wish we weren't going there."

"We must go on now we've started."

Alec was beginning to excite himself. The blaze of light acted upon him like the noise—also called

*blaze*—of trumpets. His lethargy drew off. “Fine!” he exclaimed. “Fine! And it’s all ours, Julie.”

“And Sir Pushcott Bingley’s, Alec. It’s not really ours. If ’twas . . .”

“But it *is*! I moved it, didn’t I?”

Julia raised herself to face him.

“*Did* you?” she said with great emphasis.

“Well, I s’pose I did. It moved when I wanted it to, anyhow. Don’t you remember? It moved just as I was kissing you—just then.”

“Yes, just as you were kissing me. . . .”

“I believe ’twas the kiss did it,” Alec added with affectionate inconsequence.

“No, Alec. You prayed, didn’t you?”

“*I did* pray, Julia; and *I did* kiss you too.—Julie?”

“Yes?”

“I think ’twas loving you sort o’ made me pray properly. ’Twas loving you did it. When you love anybody, you can sort of . . . You’re . . . You know what I mean. . . .”

The brougham stopped in a press of traffic returning to town from Acton. They were nearer the Holy Mountain, and through a gap they could see how the light on the slopes cast itself upwards in great beams, as well as downwards on the crowd of people, and illuminated the shoddy architecture, the ostentatious columns and cornices of the Imperial Temple, renamed the Imperial Hall of Music but still popularly called the Temple. Two searchlights swept the sky. Alec and Julia saw people on the flat roof, and made out black-and-white waiters moving about among the potted bushes and the strings of electric glow-lamps. There are certain lights and conditions of atmosphere which make the ugliest work of man into a thing of surpassing beauty. Those were the conditions that night. The Holy Mountain and the Temple with its

beer-garden roof seemed like some misty loveliness brought from another world, from the world mankind desires.

"I say, Julie ! I say ! Look ! "

Alec sat nearer to her and kept up a series of astonished exclamations which fell upon her ear as if they had been emitted from a piece of speaking machinery.

The brougham moved on a few yards, into a space crowded with vehicles and noisy beyond the ear's capacity. Underneath a bright canopy on which was picked out in coloured lamps the words—

### THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

—Alec and Julia saw a long row of turnstiles, and a large notice, *No change here. Admission One Shilling.* The turnstiles made an insufferable clicking noise though few were entering through them.

From another row of turnstiles a short distance away a seemingly endless crowd was flowing irregularly in spurts. Cab whistles and the rattle of motor buses seemed almost one with the stink of petrol.

Like many provincials when confused by the noise of great cities, Julia's thoughts turned back to the country. It flashed into her mind—the calm open Downs and the fresh wind upon them. And following that vision, came the horror of the moving of the Holy Mountain. She felt inclined to tears ; sad and hemmed in. She would have turned home even then, but that evening Alec had taken the lead. He steered her to a turnstile. The excitement and responsibility combined had wrought him up to something of the alertness of a city-born man.

"Late, sir, isn't it ?" said the gatekeeper who took their money.

"All right," Alec replied. "We want to have a look at it."

"Well, you've never seen the like, and that's a fact. My hands is stiff and black with silver."

Within the turnstiles, Alec and Julia saw a broad avenue leading straight up to the Temple. On either side were trees in boxes, tiers of lights. Few people were near them. Julia noticed that the audience from the Hall of Music were descending the Holy Mountain by another avenue which led directly from the Temple to the exit turnstiles. The bold stodgy strains of *God Save the King* forced their way down to her.

A man wearing a top-hat on which the electric arc-lights shone, was walking down the avenue. Julia saw a woman, unmistakably dressed, dart out from the shelter of one of the bushes, go up to him and pluck his arm. He shook her off violently with gestures of disgust, calling her courtesan in rough language ; and, reeling to the other side of the avenue, she fell against a lamp-post.

"Why, it's Edie Starkey !—Edie !" cried Julia.

"Now you know how I get my living, Julia Jepp. None of your drapers' shops for me ! "

With a crying moan, like that of wind, Edith Starkey ran away up the slope.

Alec pulled Julia away. She had burst into tears and was clinging to his arm. "Oh, I hate this place !" she wailed.

Alec loitered about with her for some time, until she was calmer ; and then he started again for the Temple. An impulse, his embarrassment even, compelled him to go ahead.

They came to the main entrance of the Temple. The *God Save the King* had ceased. "Can't go in now. All over !" said a commissionnaire who had *Holy Mountain* broidered in gold on his peaked cap.

"I want to go to the top."

"It's too late, sir. All over now."

"I *shall* go. It's my place."

"Eh, what?"

"I'm Alexander Trotman."

"What?"

"I'm Alexander Trotman, I tell you, and I want to go to the top."

The commissionaire looked at him closely. "The devil you are!—Beg pardon, sir," he said. "I'll take your card up to the manager, sir."

Alec gave him one of the new visiting-cards his mother had had printed.

"If you'll be good enough to wait a moment in the vestibule, sir. . . ."

The swallow-tailed manager came to them. He was obsequiously polite, examining Alec intently all the while. "We didn't expect you, or we should have been ready. Sir Pushcott said you were probably coming to-morrow with him. If you had let us know—a proper reception—you will excuse . . . ."

"I want to go on the top, on the roof," Alec interrupted irritably.

Was it not *his* Holy Mountain?

"We've had it cleared; had to do it a minute or two ago. A young woman—h'm! ah!—took her life by jumping off the parapet. We will have the place wired in to-morrow.

Julia shuddered on Alec's arm. "Was it Edie Starkey?" she whispered. "No! Don't ask. I don't want to know. I'm sure 'twas. Poor Edie. . . ."

The manager was taking them into the lift. They clung together when it started with a jolt. "Can I send you up anything?" he asked, with his eye on Julia. "A drop of brandy?"

"Yes."

"No!" said Julia.

"No, thank you," said Alec. "Leave us alone, please. All right in the fresh air."

After hovering about them for a short time, the manager went below, and they were left alone on the roof.

Alec led Julia to a seat near the edge of the beer garden. She burst into weeping. "Alec, it's wicked. It's wicked, wicked ! I'm sure 'twas poor Edie Starkey. Oh, I hate, I loathe this place ! It's brought her to this and killed her. I wish it was back in Wiltshire again. It all began with this."

Alec argued, quite uselessly of course. Julia blamed the Holy Mountain for everything. He tried to distract her by pointing over the London which lay beneath them, a sea of blackness, spotted with lights, and high buildings, and towers like the masts and shroudings of vessels in a harbour. London looked up ; the heavens down. Julia and Alec were suspended, as it were, between the living city and the still, yet hardly inanimate, sky. The night wind was gentle with them, the noise far off.

Julia was seized with a fit of weeping more violent than before. "It's wicked, Alec. Oh, how I wish you'd never moved it ! Move it back. Think of poor Edie, broken to bits, all squashed, dead, on the pavement down there. I can see her. Look ! there they are, carrying her down the slope, there—can't you see ?—like a cockroach crawling ! Move it back, Alec. Alec !"

"How can I ? "

"You can ! "

"I can't, dear. I can't move another mountain."

"*If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed . . .*"

"'Twasn't that, Julie. Julie dear, stop crying. Do ! You'll be ill. You'll shake yourself to bits."

Julia pulled herself together. Alec's words in the

brougham came back to her mind, echoed in her ear : *I think 'twas loving you sort o' made me pray properly.* '*Twas loving you did it.* She had the secret. Her mind worked with effortless rapidity. Delilah revived in her. She took up all her sex's weapons—to battle with such a Samson !

“ Allie dear, for my sake. . . . ”

She wound herself about him, body, mind and soul. She felt him beginning to give way. She kissed him ; maddened him ; implored him. She dragged him to the level of her own despairing ecstasy. Body, mind and soul she dragged, each in its own way.

“ Allie ! You love me. Alec ! For my sake. . . . Put an end to it all. If you love me, you can. I know it. You know it. It’s faith *and* love, Alec. If you had faith—a little, little faith. . . . Alec ! My love ! You *can* do it.—For my sake—Alec—dear ! You will. You *will* ! Alec. . . . ”

## XII

Hereunder are the headlines of the *Halfpenny Press*:—

APPALLING CATASTROPHE

HOLY MOUNTAIN GONE

TROTMAN'S TREACHERY

TROTMAN'S END

PERISHES WITH NEWLY WED WIFE

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¶ As Anatole Thibault, *dit* Anatole France, is to most English readers merely a name, it will be well to state that he was born in 1844 in the picturesque and inspiring surroundings of an old bookshop on the Quai Voltaire, Paris, kept by his father, Monsieur Thibault, an authority on eighteenth-century history, from whom the boy caught the passion for the principles of the Revolution, while from his mother he was learning to love the ascetic ideals chronicled in the Lives of the Saints. He was schooled with the lovers of old books, missals and manuscripts ; he matriculated on the Quais with the old Jewish dealers of curios and *objets d'art* ; he graduated in the great university of life and experience. It will be recognised that all his work is permeated by his youthful impressions ; he is, in fact, a virtuoso at large.

¶ He has written about thirty volumes of fiction. His first novel was JOCASTA & THE FAMISHED CAT (1879). THE CRIME OF SYLVESTRE BONNARD appeared in 1881, and had the distinction of being crowned by the French Academy, into which he was received in 1896.

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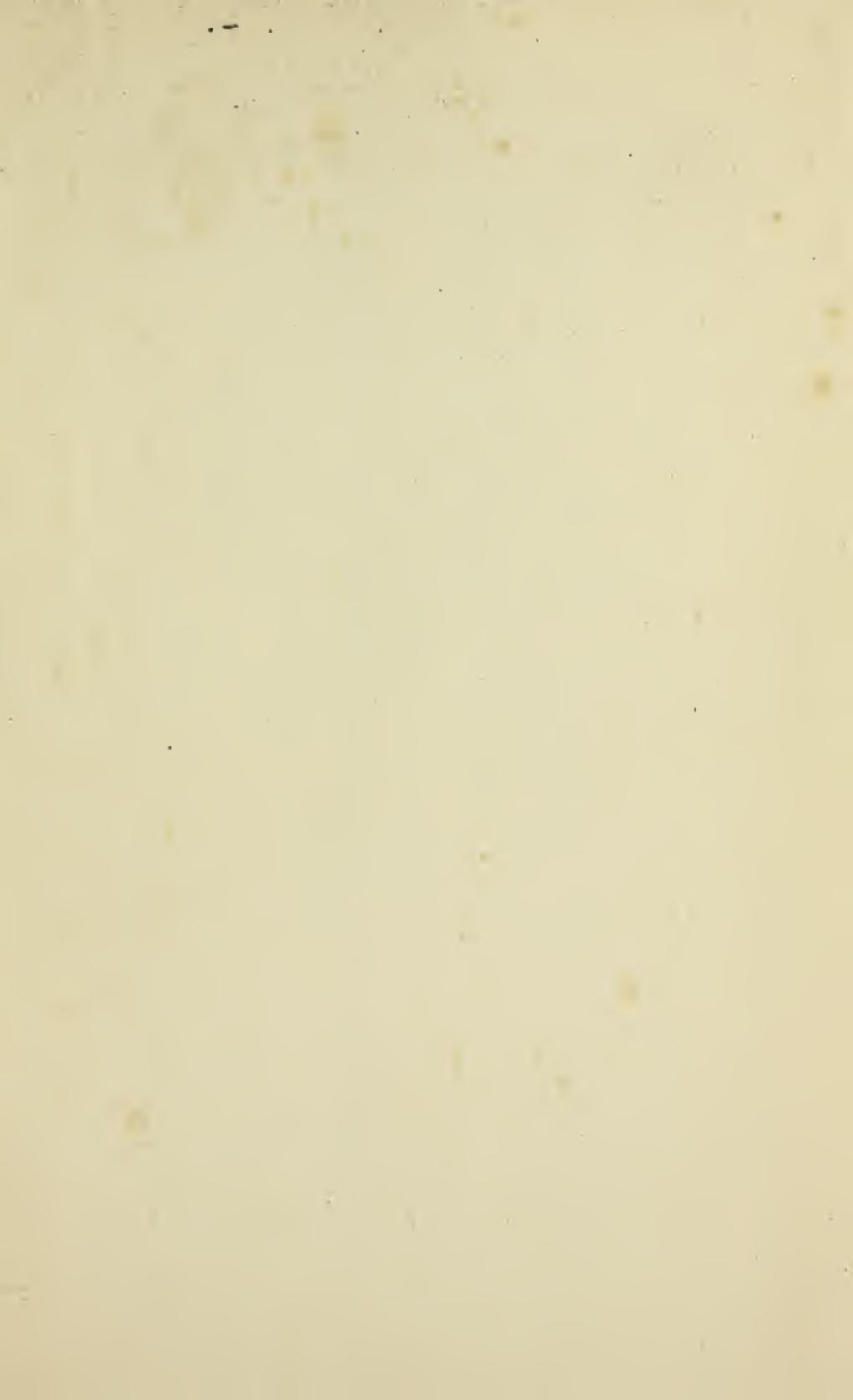
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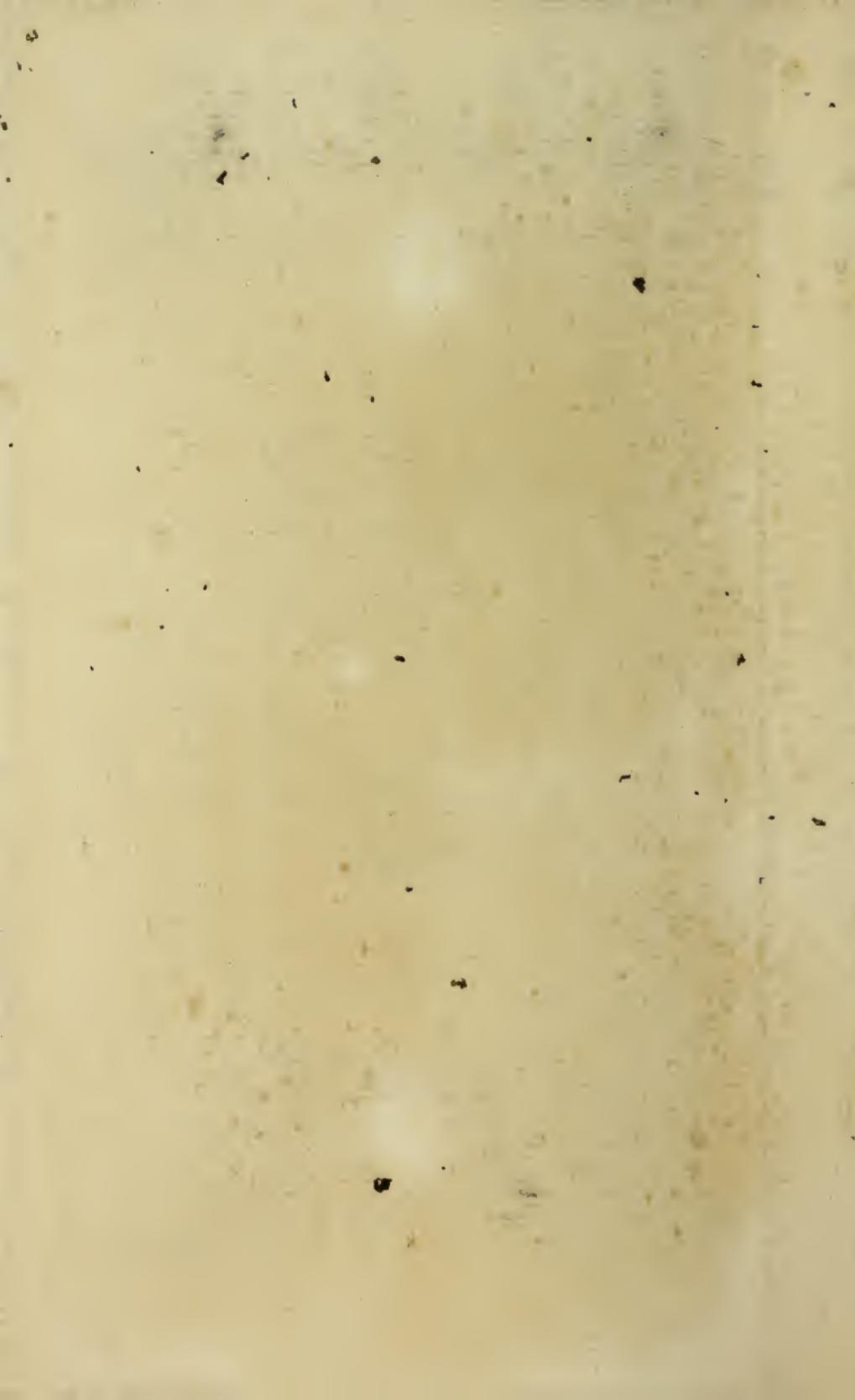
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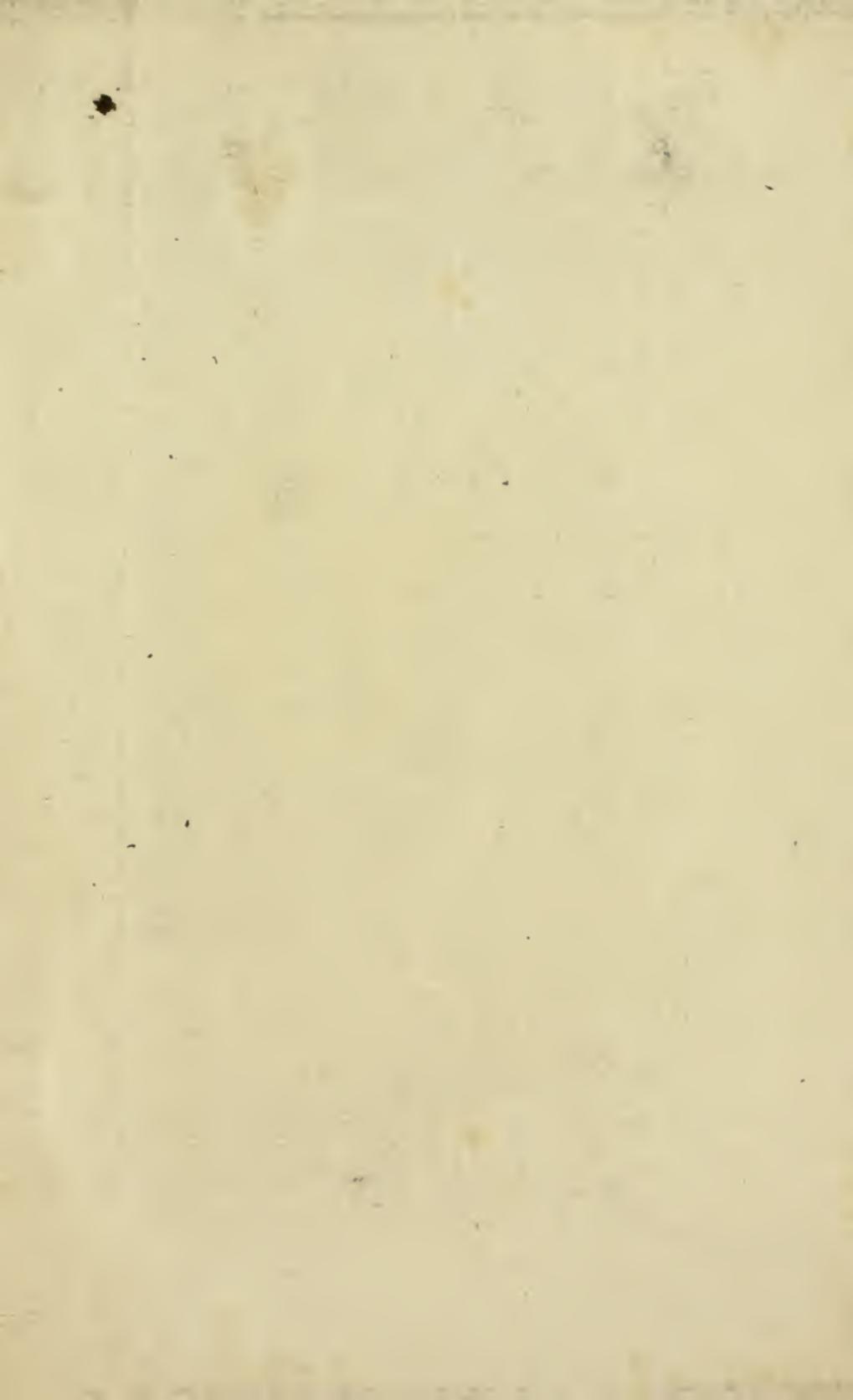
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